

LAW AND GOSPEL IN CONTEMPORARY LUTHERAN PREACHING,
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
OSWALD C. J. HOFFMANN AND EDMUND A. STEIMLE

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PREFACE

A project such as this lays one under debt to many persons, and the writer wishes to express his gratitude to some who have been of special help to him: the Reverend Oswald C. J. Hoffmann, D.D., and the Reverend Edmund A. Steimle, D.D., for their gracious consent to have their sermons subjected to critical analysis; Professor K. Morgan Edwards, my advisor, for his constant encouragement and help, even during a year when he was on sabbatical leave; Professors John B. Cobb, Jr., Rolf Knierem and Allen J. Moore, the other members of my committee, for constructive guidance at every stage of my work; Mr. W. Richard Denton for careful attention to matters of manuscript form; Mrs. Nancy Temple and Mrs. Mary Miller who typed the drafts of this material with such competence; my children, Stephen, David and Kristin, who were uncomplainingly "fatherless" at certain stages of this study; and, above all, my wife, Gretchen, without whose support this work could not have been "begun, continued and ended," and to whom it is now dedicated.

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INTRODUCTION

A. ORIENTATION

There has been, in recent decades, a chorus of voices proclaiming the decline and even the demise of the preaching office. Most writers in the field of homiletics feel under obligation to preface whatever else they have to say about preaching with doleful words about its present state and future prospects. Kyle Haselden, late editor of The Pulpit, states that "it is commonplace and correct to conclude that preaching is in the doldrums."¹ Helmut Thielicke, Europe's best known preaching theologian, writes that "preaching itself has decayed and disintegrated to the point where it is close to dying."² Domenico Grasso, a leader in the Roman Catholic movement for renewal of preaching, speaks of "the crisis of preaching."³ Offering support to such gloomy estimates are sociological analyses which present evidence that people who regularly listen to sermons score, in terms of the ethical quality of their daily actions and attitudes, about the same as, if not a little lower than, those who never go

¹Kyle Haselden, The Urgency of Preaching (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 19.

²Helmut Thielicke, The Trouble With the Church (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 2.

³Domenico Grasso, Proclaiming God's Message (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1965), p. x.

near a church.⁴

The reasons advanced to explain "the current malaise" with regard to preaching are varied. Some point to an erosion of the theological resources of those who preach, so that their message is essentially uninformed by the central affirmations of the Christian tradition.⁵ Others lay the blame to a severing of the cord which links the pulpit to the Scriptures, with a consequent loss of homiletical nourishment from the biblical kerygma.⁶ Still others, drawing upon insights from the developing field of communications theory, expose significant "barriers to communication" in the language of the sermon, the setting of the preaching event and the self-perceived role of the preacher.⁷ Some question whether the sermon, at least in its traditional monologic form, is at all fit for survival in an age moving increasingly to dialogic forms of communication.

Yet, paradoxically, these same decades, during which the pulpit has been subjected to the most radical questioning, have been a time for the most exalted theological claims for the preaching office.

⁴Cf. Gerhard E. Lenski, The Religious Factor (Garden City: Doubleday, 1961) and Peter L. Berger, The Noise of Solemn Assemblies (Garden City: Doubleday, 1961).

⁵E.g. Theodore O. Wedel, The Pulpit Rediscovered Theology (New York: Seabury Press, 1956).

⁶E.g. Donald G. Miller, Fire in Thy Mouth (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954); Charles W. F. Smith, Biblical Authority for Modern Preaching (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960).

⁷E.g. Clyde Reid, The Empty Pulpit (New York: Harper & Row, 1967); Reuel L. Howe, Partners in Preaching (New York: Seabury Press, 1967).

These claims have their direct source in the theological movements with which the names of Karl Barth and Rudolph Bultmann are identified. Both, in spite of their differences, are theologians of "the Word of God,"⁸ and both hold preaching to be the crucially important mode of that Word's transmission in the church. Barth has declared, "When the Gospel is preached, God speaks."⁹ Bultmann states, "Jesus Christ is the eschatological event as the man Jesus of Nazareth and as the Word which resounds in the mouth of those who preach him."¹⁰ The sermon, in short, is the contemporary moment in which God comes among His people with the same power and grace which were effective in Jesus Christ. Preaching is "an event in which God acts."¹¹

More recently, those theologians generally associated with "the new hermeneutic" have placed proclamation, of which the sermon is an, if not the, important form, at the center of attention. Gerhard Ebeling's assessment is typical. For him, proclamation is the "event theology exists to serve."¹² The sermon is the point at which the written text of Scripture is allowed to "become God's Word again."¹³

⁸ Gerhard Ebeling, Word and Faith (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), pp. 309-310.

⁹ Karl Barth, The Preaching of the Gospel (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), p. 12.

¹⁰ Rudolph Bultmann, Essays: Philosophical and Theological (New York: Macmillan, 1955), p. 286.

¹¹ Jean-Jacques Von Allmen, Preaching and Congregation (London: Lutterworth Press, 1962), p. 7.

¹² Ebeling, op. cit., p. 197. ¹³ Ibid., p. 329.

Since man's existence is fundamentally "linguistic," words--especially the words of Christian proclamation--have ultimate significance. The words of the sermon bring to expression "the Word that makes man human by making him a believer."¹⁴

This dissertation is written with the paradoxical situation just described in mind. It represents, in one sense, an effort to respond to the question: Why, if so much is claimed for preaching theologically, does so little appear to happen in actual instances of its practice? Other avenues of response, following the direction of the diagnoses suggested above, are both possible and important. One could draw upon the current hermeneutical discussion in an effort to relate its findings directly to the preacher's weekly task of moving from exegesis of Scripture to proclamation of the Word. One could analyze present forms of preaching in the light of accumulating data from the field of communications, and, as a result, suggest ways by which the communication of the Word of God through the words of men could occur more effectively. One could survey the personal and social ills most pervasive among the people and communities to which the preacher addresses himself, with a view to a more relevant "application" of the Christian message to the contours of the world's need.

This dissertation will move in a direction different from but not unrelated to those just mentioned. It is the writer's belief that, whatever other elements are necessary in a Christian sermon,

¹⁴Ibid., p. 328.

there is a certain theological substructure which is indispensable. This belief finds confirmation in the work of a variety of men who have addressed themselves to the homiletical task and whose conclusions will be noted in due course. Though the actual language in which they describe this theological substructure of the sermon varies considerably, there is an impressive commonality in the categories which can be discerned beneath the language. More specifically, the terms employed reflect in a remarkable way the classic Law/Gospel distinction which has been a constant theme in Lutheran theological and homiletical thought since the Reformation. Since this is the tradition in which the writer stands, he is interested in asking such questions as these: How useful are the categories of Law and Gospel in defining the fundamental content of the sermon? Can we employ them in precisely the way Luther did in his theological formulations and in his preaching? How do Law and Gospel, in fact, reach expression in representative Lutheran preaching today? Will serious attention to the meaning of Law and Gospel reward preachers today with a surer grasp of what it is they are to preach and thus help close the gap between theological affirmations about preaching and actual sermons? It is to such questions as these that this dissertation addresses itself.

B. METHODOLOGY

The dissertation will be developed by means of alternating chapters of primarily historico-theological discussion with chapters

of primarily empirical analysis. Chapters One, Three and Five will bring together a summary of Luther's use of the categories of Law and Gospel and some of the current discussions of these same themes. The literature with regard to the "Law-Gospel problem" is enormous,¹⁵ and no effort will be made in this dissertation to comprehend it

Certain theologians, as, for example, Ott and Wingren, have explicitly discussed the relationship between Law and Gospel and preaching. Others, as, for example, Tillich and Ebeling, are notable for having offered new interpretations of the classic Law/Gospel categories. Still others, such as Aulen, stay more cautiously inside the Reformation understanding of these categories. Another group, among whom C. H. Dodd, Paul Althaus and Wilfried Joest are prominent, have taken up the complex problem of the so-called "third use of the Law." It is principally to these theologians that we will turn in the historico-theological chapters. Out of our reflections on their work we will propose certain criteria by which the preaching of Law and Gospel today can be appraised.

Chapter One will follow the pattern just described with regard to the preaching of Law. It will develop the thesis that the Law can reach homiletical expression in either of two modes: as a "hammer of judgment," or, as a "mirror of existence."

¹⁵ Cf. Gerhard O. Forde, The Law-Gospel Debate (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1969), for a review of the contemporary discussion, together with a comprehensive bibliography of the current literature.

Chapter Three will turn to the preaching of Gospel. It will be argued that the mode in which the Gospel is preached must be correlated with the mode in which the Law is preached.

Chapter Five will address itself to the vexing question (for Lutherans) of "the third use of the Law." It will contend that, no matter how the "third use" issue is resolved, the call to obedience is an essential dimension of the Christian sermon.

The alternate chapters, Two, Four and Six, will apply the criteria developed at the close of chapters One, Three and Five to an analysis of selected sermons from two contemporary Lutheran preachers, Oswald C. J. Hoffmann and Edmund A. Steimle. The primary modes in which they preach both Law and Gospel will be established, and an estimate of their homiletical work will be ventured on the basis of the degree to which they fulfill the criteria proposed in the theoretical chapters.

No effort will be made to analyze the total sermonic output of either preacher. Thirty-five sermons by Steimle, published in two separate volumes (Are You Looking For God? 1957, and Disturbed by Joy, 1967), and thirty-two printed manuscripts from Hoffmann's 1968 radio series on the Lutheran Hour will be used as a basis for the study.

C. THE PREACHERS

Hoffmann and Steimle have been chosen as the preachers for analysis because of the special function each man fills in his particular branch of American Lutheranism. Both are nationally known radio

preachers for their denominations, and, by virtue of this fact, speak regularly to incomparably more listeners than any other contemporary American Lutheran preachers. Thus, they project a certain public "image" of Lutheran preaching today and are also in a position to provide homiletical models for many other Lutheran clergy.

A brief outline of the career of each man will be of interest. Oswald Hoffmann, born in 1913 in Snyder, Nebraska, was educated in a secondary school, college and seminary of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, of which he is still a member. He has an M.A. degree from the University of Minnesota. The early part of his ministry was in the field of education: 1936-40, instructor at Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minnesota; 1940-41, instructor at the University of Minnesota; 1941-48, professor at Concordia Collegiate Institute, Bronxville, New York. From 1948-63, he served as Director of the Public Relations Department, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. His experience as a parish pastor has been limited to part-time service in the course of his other forms of ministry. Since 1955 he has been the regular preacher on the International Lutheran Hour, which is a weekly radio program produced by the Lutheran Laymen's League, an organization related to the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. From 1963 to the present, work with the International Lutheran Hour has been his full-time ministry.¹⁶

¹⁶ Who's Who in America (Chicago: Marquis, 1968), XXXV (1968-1969), 1040.

Edmund Steinle was born in Allentown, Pennsylvania, in 1907. His education has been at Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts, Princeton University and the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia. He has an M.A. degree from the University of Pennsylvania. After two years as a teaching fellow at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, he served for seventeen years as a parish pastor—from 1935-40, at the Lutheran Church of Our Saviour, Jersey City, New Jersey--and from 1940-52, at University Lutheran Church, Cambridge, Massachusetts. In 1952, he was called to be Hagan Professor of Practical Theology, with primary responsibility in the field of homiletics, in the seminary from which he was graduated. He served in this capacity until 1961, when he succeeded Paul Scherer as Brown Professor of Homiletics at Union (NYC) Theological Seminary, the position he still holds.¹⁷ Since 1955, he has been the annual preacher on the thirteen week Lutheran sequence of the Protestant Hour Network, an inter-denominational broadcast in which the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church, USA, and the Protestant Episcopal Church also participate.

D. OBJECTIVE

Before proceeding into the body of this study, it will be helpful to state again as explicitly as possible its objective. It is designed to explore the question of the usefulness of the classic Law/Gospel categories for understanding the nature of the preaching

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 2089.

task today. Rooted in the biblical witness and renewed in their vitality during the Reformation period, these categories are a familiar part of the working vocabulary of most Protestant preachers. Especially Lutheran preachers have been nurtured in this tradition. But it must be asked whether those who preach today can accept unaltered this gift from the past. Are the ways in which Law and Gospel functioned for Luther, for example, the most viable modes for this generation? And, if there are other possibilities open for preaching Law and Gospel today, what guidelines can be developed to assist the parish pastor in his homiletical work?

One issue of particular concern for Lutheran preaching grows out of Lutheranism's traditional discomfort with regard to a so-called "third use of the Law." As will be noted in the course of this study, the phrase itself receives at best dubious support in current Luther studies. Yet, even those who reject outright the phrase are loathe to ignore the concern for the ethical quality of the Christian life toward which the formulation "third use of the Law" is directed. In terms of homiletics, the issue can be stated thus: Does Lutheran theology allow a place for preaching which sounds a call to obedience? Is the sermon legitimately concerned with tracing out the ethical consequences of justification and exhorting men toward their fulfillment?

The theoretical chapters of the dissertation will offer possible answers to the questions with which the two preceding paragraphs close. An equally important feature of this study, however,

will be the testing of such proposals as are made in the chapters which subject two concrete samplings of contemporary Lutheran preaching to thematic analysis. It is hoped that such analysis will illustrate a way in which today's preacher can reflect upon his own homiletical work to the end that its theological depth and its existential reach will be increased.

CHAPTER I

THE PREACHING OF LAW

It is the purpose of this chapter to bring together a review of Luther's treatment of the Law and a survey of contemporary discussions of the same subject which have special significance for preaching. It will be seen that, while there is continuity between Luther's and our understanding of the Law and its preaching, there is also a discernible discontinuity. At least, a recognizable shift of emphasis has appeared in our time, and it will be argued that it is precisely at this point of divergence from Luther's primary focus that some of the most fruitful possibilities for preaching Law today emerge. The criteria for preaching Law, with which the chapter closes, will be drawn both out of the heritage from Luther and the present day discussion.

A. THE REFORMATION HERITAGE

Before moving to a review of Luther's understanding of the Law, it will be useful to sketch the wider framework within which the preaching of Law, the preaching of Gospel and the call to obedience must be held. Something should be said, at least briefly, about Luther's doctrine of the twofold form of the Word of God and the way in which preaching is related to this Word.

1. The Twofold Form of the Word of God.

It is clear that the resurgent "Word of God" theologies of the twentieth century have their most direct roots in Luther. The God who addresses man with His Word stands at the center of Luther's thought. God is the One who again and again breaks the silence of eternity and speaks to man. His voice has been heard since the Creation--by the patriarchs, through prophets and apostles and supremely in Jesus Christ. In fact, Luther's theology has been characterized as "a theology of the Word of God,"¹ and at least one Luther scholar concludes that "the God who speaks" would be an appropriate way to summarize Luther's picture of God."²

This concentration upon "the God who speaks" is the correlate of Luther's insistence that man has no access to the mystery of God's essential being, i.e., to "the absolute God." God in Himself is simply beyond his reach. The "unclothed God" would overwhelm and destroy us in His majesty. Luther rebukes those who presume to "rise into heaven with their speculations and think about God as He is in Himself."³ We must rather lay hold of the God who comes to us "not naked but clothed and revealed in His Word."⁴

¹Jaroslav Pelikan, in Martin Luther, Works (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), vol. 30a "Luther the Expositor," p. 48.

²Ibid., p. 50.

³Martin Luther, "Commentary on Psalm 45" (1533-1534), in Ibid., XII, 312.

⁴Ibid. Cf. also, "Now God in His own nature and majesty is to be left alone; in this regard, we have nothing to do with Him, nor

Just as man cannot know God in His essential being, so he cannot know Him in His primal unity. The revealing Word reaches man in twofold form. God always addresses man in one of two roles--either as the God of wrath or as the God of mercy. So sharp is the tension between these two roles that it must seem to man almost as though he were experiencing two different gods. Yet, it is not two gods but the One God, exercising through wrath and judgment His "alien work" and through grace and forgiveness His "proper work." It is by His Word as Law that God executes His "alien work"; it is by His Word as Gospel that He accomplishes His "proper work."

No distinction is more basic or pervasive in Luther's thought than this between Law and Gospel. In his early works, he follows the scholastics in distinguishing between the "old law" of the Old Testament and the "new law" (or Gospel) of the New Testament, describing the former as outward and physical in its content and the latter inward and spiritual.⁵ In his mature thought, however, the distinction is not between the two testaments but between two radically different modes of God's Word to man, each of which can be found in both

does He wish us to deal with Him. We have to do with Him as clothed and displayed in His Word, by which He presents Himself to us." Martin Luther, "The Bondage of the Will" (1525), in his Selections from His Writings (Garden City: Doubleday, 1961), p. 191.

⁵ Cf. Julius T. Köstlin, Luther's Theologie in Ihrer Geschichtlichen Entwicklung und Ihrer Inneren Zusammenhänge (Stuttgart: Steinkopf, 1883), I, 60-62.

testaments.⁶ In fact, the same passage in the Bible can function both as Law and Gospel on different occasions. The First Commandment, for example, can deliver man to condemnation for his idolatries, but, in its proclamation of God's sovereignty, it can also be the sure foundation of man's trust.⁷

It is not in Scripture, however, but in preaching that the twofold form of the Word of God reaches clearest expression. Luther never tires of pressing the primacy of the Word preached from a human mouth in a living congregation. Though he can praise Scripture as a queen who must rule in the church, the written form of the Word of God is not permitted to occupy the throne reserved for the spoken form. He cites the fact that the New Testament Gospel was preached before it was written down. As a summons to men to repent and believe, the Word's natural and proper form is spoken. The Church is a "mouth house" rather than a "pen house."⁸ Scripture is the

⁶"Holy Scripture is....a chalice which contains sweet and bitter portions together." Ibid., I, 63.

⁷Pelikan, op. cit., p. 66.

⁸"Church Postilla" (1522), quoted in Regin Prenter, "Luther on Word and Sacrament," in More About Luther (Decorah, Iowa: Luther College Press, 1958), p. 73.

Cf. "And the Gospel should really not be something written, but a spoken word which brought forth the Scriptures, as Christ and the apostles have done. This is why Christ himself did not write anything but only spoke. He called his teaching not Scripture but gospel, meaning good news or a proclamation that is spread not by pen but by word of mouth." Martin Luther, "A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels" (1522), in his Works, XXXV, 23.

Cf. also, "Notice: let their voices be heard; it does not say: let their books be read. The ministry of the New Testament is not engraved on dead tablets of stone; rather it sounds in a living

transcribed deposit of the originally preached Word and serves as a norm for the church's continued preaching, but it can never replace oral proclamation as the living address through which God, by His Word, stirs men to repentance and brings them to faith.

It is in preaching, therefore, that the right distinction between Law and Gospel becomes crucially important.⁹ The oral proclamation of the sermon is the means by which God addresses men in the present moment with either His Word of judgment or His Word of Grace. Through the living voice of the preacher God speaks either to terrify or to comfort. Nothing is more important for the preacher than to know when and how to wield the rod of the Law or to apply the balm of the Gospel.¹⁰ Any confusion of the two categories results in the vitiation of both. If the Law is robbed of its power to accuse and condemn man as a sinner who can offer nothing acceptable to God, then man's predicament is not extreme and the Word of grace is scarcely

voice. Through a Living Word God accomplishes and fulfills the Gospel." "Operationes in Psalmos" (1519-1521), quoted in Prenter, op. cit., p. 73.

⁹Cf. "Christian preaching is the process in which the distinction between the law and the gospel takes place. . . . The concern of Christian preaching is to put into practice the distinction between the law and the gospel, that is, to carry on the progress of a battle, in which again and again the distinction between the law and the gospel is newly at issue and is made in practice." In Gerhard Ebeling's Luther: An Introduction to His Thought (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), p. 117.

¹⁰"...for people are of two kinds. On the one hand are the contrite who need consolation. On the other hand are the rigid, to whom apply the law, threats, examples of wrath, the fire of Elijah, the waters of the flood, and the destruction of Jerusalem; these must be attacked at once and must be made to feel terror." Martin Luther, "Table Talk" (1533), in his Works, LIV, 106.

needed. If, on the other hand, the Gospel is presented as in any sense a new demand laid upon men, then man's predicament is indeed total, for there remains no Word promising him release from a burden already impossible for him to carry. The first error leads men into the false security of a smug self-righteousness; the second plunges them into an abyss of despair. Either way destroys the possibility of a right relationship with God in which man's faith and God's grace are in dynamic interaction. It was in the interest of preserving this right relationship, symbolized in the phrase "justification by grace through faith," that Luther insisted on the sharp distinction between Law and Gospel, for "if the doctrine of justification be lost, the whole of Christian doctrine is lost."¹¹

Yet, Luther was under no illusion that to distinguish between Law and Gospel is an easy task. Distinguishable in terms of theological analysis and even "more than mutually contradictory, they are nevertheless very closely joined in experience."¹² They lie interlaced with each other in the same heart, for the Christian man is always at the same time "sinner and justified." Therefore, he never hears the promise of the Gospel without, insofar as he is still "in the flesh," hearing also the rumbling threats of the Law. Nor does

¹¹Martin Luther, "Lectures on Galatians" (1535), in Ibid., XXVI, 9.

¹²Ibid., XXVI, 337.

he hear the threats of the Law without, insofar as he is "in the Spirit," rejoicing in the promise of forgiveness God gives him in the Gospel. Especially "in the hour of death or in other conflicts of conscience"¹³ the polarities of fear and trust, Law and Gospel, sin and grace, become scarcely distinguishable. In fact, such is the nature of man that in actual experience he finds "the Gospel a rare guest but the Law a constant guest" in his conscience.¹⁴ This human, experiential difficulty in separating what may be easily divided in theological analysis led Luther to the statement, frequently quoted:

There's no man living on earth who knows how to distinguish between the law and the gospel. We may think we understand it when we're listening to a sermon, but we're far from it. Only the Holy Spirit knows this. Even the man Christ was so wanting in understanding when he was in the vineyard that an angel had to console him [John 12:27-29]; though he was a doctor from heaven he was strengthened by an angel. Because I've been writing so much and so long about it, you'd think I'd know the distinction, but when a crisis comes I recognize very well that I am far, far from understanding. So God alone should and must be our holy master.¹⁵

2. The Word as Law.

There is an ambivalence with regard to the Law in Reformation theology. Edgar Carlson, in his study of contemporary Swedish Luther research, notes Luther's originality in adding the Law and God's

¹³ Ibid., XXVI, 10, 343; cf. also p. 115.

¹⁴ Ibid., XXVI, 117.

¹⁵ Martin Luther, "Table Talk" (1531), in Ibid., LIV, 127.

wrath to the list of tyrants under which man suffers.¹⁶ Classical theology had spoken only of "sin, death and the devil." Such a negative estimation of the Law on Luther's part seems to be in sharp contradiction to the positive appraisal in the Formula of Concord:

We believe, teach and confess that the Law is properly a divine doctrine, which teaches what is right and pleasing to God, and reproves everything that is sin and contrary to God's will.¹⁷

The resolution of this apparent contradiction lies in an understanding of man as sinner. The Law, as an expression of the will of God for human life, can only be good, for God is good. In fact, it is "the best of all things in the world,"¹⁸ and if man were able to fulfill it, its reward to him would be eternal life. But fallen man is incapable of fulfilling the Law. Its original promise, therefore, appears to him now as a threat, and he tries to remove the threat by a vain struggle to regain God's favor through the fulfillment of all that the Law demands. But this only drives him into a deeper awareness of his impotence. Thus, for man as he actually is in history, the Law is a terrifying tyrant barring his way to God. Fallen man always tries to turn the Law into an instrument for his justification, and the Law, thus misapplied, becomes God's curse over his life

¹⁶Edgar M. Carlson, The Reinterpretation of Luther (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1948), p. 68.

¹⁷Henry Eyster Jacobs (ed.) The Book of Concord (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Publication House, 1911), p. 38.

¹⁸Luther, "Lectures on Galatians" (1535), in his Works, XXVI, 5.

rather than His blessing.¹⁹ It holds him in a prison from which there is no escape. It tells him there is no salvation save through fulfillment of its mandate but then lays upon him commands impossible to fulfill. Furthermore, all man's efforts to win salvation over this route are themselves sinful, because they seize the matter from God's hands, where it belongs, thereby violating the First Commandment.²⁰ Luther employs many graphic images to depict the hopelessness of the man who attempts to storm heaven by way of the Law. He is like Sisyphus, eternally pushing his huge boulder to the top of a hill, only to watch it roll down again.²¹ In all his struggling to move forward, he makes "crab's progress,"²² i.e., he succeeds only in going backwards. He is like a man who tries to get himself clean by washing with dirt.²³ He is like one beggar trying to help another, as in the old proverb in which "one of these is milking a billy goat and the other is holding the sieve!"²⁴

¹⁹"Apart from the matter of justification, . . . we, like Paul, should think reverentially of the Law. We should endow it with the highest praises and call it holy, righteous, good, spiritual, divine, etc. Apart from our conscience we should make a god of it, but in our conscience it is truly a devil, for in the slightest trial it cannot encourage or comfort the conscience but does the very opposite." Ibid., XXVI, 365.

²⁰"In 'keeping' the Law, therefore, they not only do not keep it, but they also deny the First Commandment, the promises of God, and the blessing promised to Abraham. They deny faith and try to bless themselves by their own works, that is, to justify themselves, to set themselves free from sin and death, to overcome the devil and to capture heaven by force--which is to deny God and to set onself up in place of God." Ibid., XXVI, 251.

²¹Ibid., XXVI, 406. ²²Ibid., XXVII, 13.

²³Ibid. ²⁴Ibid., XXVI, 403, 404.

Nevertheless, this Law which has become a tyrant for sinful man is still a form of the Word of God and, as such, has a twofold use in the divine economy. The Smalcald Articles summarize the classic Lutheran position in these terms:

Here we hold that the Law was given by God, first to restrain in by threats and the dread of punishment, and by the promise of grace and favor. . . . But the chief office or power of the Law is that it reveal original sin with all its fruits, and show man how very low his nature has fallen, and that it has become utterly corrupted. . . .²⁵

The first of these uses is generally designated the usus politicus, or the usus civilis; the second, the usus theologicus, or the usus spiritualis. We will turn now to a closer examination of each.

a. The usus politicus. The "political" or "civil" function of the Law is made necessary by reason of the curse of sin under which the world lies. Mankind is "possessed by the devil and is being led headlong into every crime."²⁶ Lying, theft, fornication, sedition and murder tear at the fabric of society. Only the fact that God in His goodness has established and continues to preserve order in the world saves society from self-destruction. This is the "first use" of the Law: ". . . as the ropes or the chains prevent a lion or a bear from ravaging something that comes along,"²⁷ so the Law acts as a restraint upon human wickedness.

²⁵Jacobs, op. cit., pp. 322, 323.

²⁶Luther, "Lectures on Galatians" (1535), in his Works, XXVI, 309.

²⁷Ibid., XXVI, 308.

The state is the chief arm of the Law in its civil function. Magistrates and princes have been given the power of the sword, so that by its constant threat they can impel men to an external obedience to the will of God. Otherwise, sin would reign unchecked, and even the most minimal necessities for existence could not be maintained. Crops and property would be pillaged, homes would be violated, human life would be in constant jeopardy. Put more positively, the Law in its civil function permits commerce, maintains a measure of peace among men, makes possible the education of the young, and, most important, permits the Gospel to be freely preached.

Not only the state but also the other "orders" of society are instruments of God in His execution of the "civil use" of the Law. In addition to government, Luther usually designates these "orders" as the economic, the familial and the ecclesiastical (the church in its institutional form).²⁸ In the interlacing demands and duties which prevail in the relationships between master and servant, employer and worker, teacher and pupil, husband and wife, parent and child a sturdy fabric is woven by which mankind is bound together. Often these relationships are not governed by any formal legal code; nevertheless, there is a divine Law which assigns to each person an "office" or "station," the fulfillment of which contributes to the preservation

²⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Ethics (New York: Macmillan, 1955), pp. 73f. Bonhoeffer prefers to speak of "mandates" rather than "orders."

of man's life in the world.²⁹

It is to be carefully noted that though the Law in its "civil use" is a sign of God's love for the world, it has nothing to do with man's justification. A man attains no merit before God by performing the duties of his office. Even wicked men can achieve a certain measure of "civil righteousness," but their obedience is external and their hearts are motivated by fear. The very fact that the restraining power of the Law is necessary for mankind "makes it abundantly clear that those who have need of it--as does everyone who is outside Christ--are not righteous but unrighteous and insane, whom it is necessary to tame with the rope and with prison to keep them from sinning."³⁰ Far from contributing to man's justification, therefore, the Law in its "civil" use is an indirect sign of his desperate need.

b. The usus theologicus. With the "theological" or "spiritual" use of the Law, we move into what Luther calls the Law's "proper" function. Here the demands of the Law are radically deepened. God wills not merely the external obedience, motivated by fear of the sword, which leads to civil righteousness. He requires an interior obedience which out of a pure heart joyfully and spontaneously loves

²⁹Against Agricola and certain others who were moving in the direction of antinomianism, Luther declared: ". . . to reject the law, without which neither church authority nor home nor any individual can exist, is to kick the bottom out of the barrel." Luther, "Table Talk" (1537), in his Works, LIV, 248.

³⁰Luther, "Lectures on Galatians" (1535), in Ibid., XXIV, 308.

both Him and the neighbor. Insight into the depth and breadth of this demand is to be found in the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus makes clear the full dimensions of the Law which Moses set before man in the Ten Commandments and which God from the beginning has written on men's hearts.

But men sense neither the radicalness of God's demand upon them nor the utter bankruptcy of their efforts to fulfill it.³¹ On the contrary, it is typical of men to be swollen with pride and to nurture the illusion that they have rendered God an obedience which is acceptable to Him. Therefore, "God has to send some Hercules, namely, the Law, to attack and subdue this monster [self-righteousness] with full force."³² The Law is a "large and powerful hammer"³³ with which God smashes all pretensions and brings haughty and calloused men to their knees. It is "a fire, a wind, and a great and mighty earthquake that overturns mountains."³⁴ It shocks men out of their complacency about their standing before God, holds before their eyes the horrifying sight of their sin and disobedience, and plunges them into despair.

For just as on Mt. Sinai the lightning, the thunder, the dark cloud, the smoking and burning mountain, and the whole horrendous sight did not make the Children of Israel happy or alive but

³¹"You cannot have this knowledge through your own nature, for your nature is so blind that it does not know what Christ and his law is, nor does it know how deeply it lies in sin." Martin Luther, "Two Sermons Preached at Weimar" (1522), in Ibid., LI, 105.

³²Luther, "Lectures on Galatians" (1535), in Ibid., XXVI, 309-310.

³³Ibid., XXVI, 310. ³⁴Ibid.

terrified them, made them almost helpless and disclosed a presence of God speaking from the cloud that they could not bear for all their sanctity and purity, so when the Law is being used correctly, it does nothing but reveal sin, work wrath, accuse, terrify, and reduce the minds of men to the point of despair. And that is as far as the Law goes.³⁵

Thus, the Law is for sinful man an implacable foe. In the words of the Apology to the Augsburg Confession, "The Law always accuses"³⁶ It confronts us as our prosecutor and always wins its case. It brings down upon us the sentence of death from an angry Judge.

The Law executes its accusatory function not chiefly in terms of external and visible "sins" but in terms of man's basal, primal sin. It is true that human wickedness exercises itself through theft, fornication, murder, dishonor to parents and other authorities, and in innumerable other ways. But feeding all these violations of God's commands and virulently operative even when such outward signs of evil are not evident is man's root sin of unbelief : "...only ungodliness and unbelief of heart, and no outer work make him guilty and a damnable servant of sin."³⁷ Man is, at the core of his being, "curved inward" upon himself and thus away from God. This fatal fact makes it impossible for him to fulfill the First Commandment, which properly heads the table of God's Law. Because he cannot "set

³⁵Ibid., XXVI, 313.

³⁶Jacobs, op. cit., p. 90.

³⁷Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian" (1520), in his Selections from his Writings, p. 56.

his heart and put his trust" upon the true God, man succumbs to a thousand idolatries.³⁸ From this fundamental spring of iniquity--the unfaith which causes us to reject God's promises and turn elsewhere for our security--spring all the other transgressions. It is for this reason that God has attached a terrible threat to the statement of the First Commandment of the Decalogue.³⁹

Yet, even in its accusatory, death-dealing function, the Law is meant to serve the purposes of God's grace. When a man is caught in the throes of the Law, he stands between God and the devil.⁴⁰ If the devil gets the upper hand, the Law will drive the man away from God and into final despair, like that of Judas. But it may also be that God will use this crisis to turn a man to repentance. In such a case, the Law finally drives a man to Christ. Convinced of his utter hopelessness, man "looks about and sighs for the help of the Mediator and

³⁸"Lo, you have here the true honor and service of God, which pleases God, and which he commands under penalty of eternal wrath, viz. that the heart know no other trust or confidence than in him, and do not suffer itself to be torn from him, but for him risk and disregard everything on earth. On the other hand, you can easily see and judge how the world practices only false worship and idolatry. For no person has ever been so godless as not to institute and observe some sort of divine service. Thus everyone has set up as his own god whatever he looked to for blessings, help and comfort. . . . everyone makes that to which his heart is inclined his god." "The Large Catechism" (1529), in Jacobs, op. cit., pp. 392-393.

³⁹Ibid., p. 394.

⁴⁰Cf. Paul Althaus, The Theology of Martin Luther (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 259.

Savior."⁴¹ It is in this sense that the Law has a part to play in justification. It does not itself justify; it can only condemn. But when we writhe beneath the burden of condemnation, the Law can be "a most useful servant impelling us to Christ."⁴² It is the "school-master" who, by its whipping, drives us to Christ. Therefore, when a man is experiencing affliction of conscience, he should begin to take heart, for he is "being killed by the Law in order to be made alive through Christ."⁴³ He should know that

. . . hunger is the best cook. As the dry earth thirsts for rain, so the Law makes the troubled heart thirst for Christ. To such hearts Christ tastes sweetest; to them He is joy, comfort, and life. Only then are Christ and His work understood correctly.⁴⁴

The preacher is, of course, God's chief instrument in bringing the Law in its "spiritual" use to bear upon men's consciences. God rules in the church through preaching, just as He rules in the world through burgomasters, kings and princes, and preachers are not to be remiss in "the office of rebuking in the church."⁴⁵ It should be noted, however, that preachers can arouse sleeping consciences not only by threats and demands; the preaching of the Gospel itself can have the effect of Law. The announcement of a Redeemer already presupposes man's bondage in sin. Furthermore, there is no more powerful way of opening a man's eyes to the poverty of his life than to hold

⁴¹Luther, "Lectures on Galatians" (1535), in his Works, XXVI, 131.

⁴²Ibid., XXVI, 315. ⁴³Ibid., XXVI, 339. ⁴⁴Ibid., XXVI, 329.

⁴⁵Quoted in Ewald M. Plass (ed.), What Luther Says (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), III, 1115.

before him the vision of God's boundless goodness. By arousing in him a sense of shame for his ingratitude and disobedience to such a Father and to the Son who suffered on his behalf, the proclamation of the Gospel can itself strike man's heart as Law.⁴⁶

B. THE CONTEMPORARY DISCUSSION

We turn now from this descriptive report of the understanding of Law which Lutheran preachers have received from their Reformation heritage to a survey of some of the contemporary discussions of Law which bear particularly upon the preaching task. Our focus will be on the "theological use" of the Law which Luther designated as its "proper function."

1. The Necessity of Preaching Law.

Among Lutheran homileticians writing today there is a consensus that the Law must be preached. H. Grady Davis, whose Design for Preaching is probably the most widely used homiletics textbook in Lutheran seminaries, calls "diagnosis," along with "etiology" and "prescription," one of the essential elements in the process of interpretation which leads to the sermon. The preacher is under obligation to be honestly realistic about the condition of man. Under no circumstances is he to "take man's side in the mutiny against the holy Will."⁴⁷ If

⁴⁶Cf. Althaus, op. cit., pp. 261-266 for a fuller discussion of this point.

⁴⁷Henry Grady Davis, Design for Preaching (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), p. 229.

he does not lay bare the radical nature of man's need, he is guilty of "covering malignant sores on the fair body of man with sugary ointment"⁴⁸ and in the process vitiates any real reason for proclaiming the Gospel of God's deliverance. Richard Caemmerer, mentor to a whole generation of Missouri Synod preachers, writes, "The preacher speaks the Word of God's judgment upon man's sin, to alert men to the Gospel."⁴⁹ He compares the state of unredeemed humanity to the condition of a man who freezes to death in a snowdrift, all the while suffering the delusion that he is warm. The aim of the preacher of Law is to alert man to the horror of his situation.

Paul Scherer warns against "toning down...the lively Word of a living God"⁵⁰ and states that the uncovering of "the tragic estate of the human soul"⁵¹ is one of the basic elements in the content of the sermon. Edmund A. Steimle, Scherer's successor in the chair of homiletics at Union (New York) Theological Seminary, declared in his installation address that "we cannot possibly avoid preaching Law and Gospel if our preaching is a faithful witness to the self-revealing

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 230.

⁴⁹Richard R. Caemmerer, Preaching for the Church (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), p. 21.

⁵⁰Paul Scherer, The Word God Sent (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 69.

⁵¹Paul Scherer, For We Have This Treasure (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944), p. 82.

activity of God."⁵² Steimle, however, enters an important qualification, by arguing that for contemporary man, in his condition of anxiety and disillusionment, the proper point of contact "is not Law but rather Gospel."⁵³ The situation of twentieth century man, he claims, is more analogous to that of the Hebrew exiles languishing in Babylon, to whom Second Isaiah cried, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people....," than to that of the brazen sinners of Bethel practicing their injustice under the cover of piety, upon whom Amos called down the divine wrath.⁵⁴ Steimle quotes with approval a lengthy passage from Giovanni Miegge which speaks of man today as "already potentially contrite" and therefore so placed that "it is not even necessary to preach the Gospel of repentance."⁵⁵

Lutheran theologians who address themselves today to the problem of the church's preaching concur in the homileticians' insistence that the Law must be preached. Gustav Wingren, in a full-length study of the preaching task, writes of the coordinate functions of Law and Gospel in Christian proclamation:

There is but one kerygma, the Gospel of death and resurrection. The law, in exercising its function, is not at strife with the kerygma but in its service. When the law is at work that

⁵²Edmund A. Steimle, "The Problem of Motivation in the Contemporary Pulpit," Union Seminary Quarterly Review, XVII: 1 (November 1961), 8.

⁵³Ibid., p. 11. ⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 8-9.

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 10-11. Quoted from Giovanni Miegge, Christian Affirmations in a Secular World (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 136-137.

which the Gospel promises can fully be accomplished; man can die and rise again, thanks to the double action in which the Law and the Gospel cooperate.⁵⁶

Gerhard Ebeling urges that "for the sake of the Gospel the law must come to expression, if the Gospel itself is not to be misunderstood as law," and calls its proper preaching necessary for "the intelligibility of the Gospel."⁵⁷

This unanimity with regard to the necessity for the preaching of the Law, disclosing as it does continuity with the Reformation tradition, must not be interpreted to mean that there have been no shifts since the sixteenth century in understanding how the Law is to be preached. As one reads current discussions of the meaning of the Law, he becomes conscious of an interpretation of its nature which, while not negating the understanding of classic Lutheran theology, supplements it in a significant way. At least, dimensions of the Law's meaning which were secondary in Luther's writing and preaching have now moved into a position of parity with his own characteristic emphasis. This new understanding finds expression in Lutheran preaching, as well as in more formal theology, and needs to be examined.

2. The Law as "Hammer of Judgment."

Ebeling summarizes Luther's understanding of the Law as follows:

⁵⁶Gustav Wingren, The Living Word (London: SCM Press, 1949), p. 139.

⁵⁷Gerhard Ebeling, Word and Faith (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), p. 281.

Law for Luther is not a revealed statutory norm to which man then adopts this attitude or that, but law is for Luther an existentialist category which sums up the theological interpretation of man's being as it in fact is. Law is therefore not an aggregate of principles, but the reality of fallen man.⁵⁸
(Underlining mine.)

Certainly one could not object to hearing Luther's concept of Law characterized as "existentialist," if by that is meant that it has to do with man at the very depths of his existence in this world. It surely does have to do with his "being as it in fact is." Actually, one could so characterize Luther's theology in its entirety. Its radical theocentricity, of which the very title of Philip Watson's study, Let God Be God!, takes note, does not negate what can only be seen as a corresponding strain of "anthropocentricity." What God does is always directed man-ward. He deals in judgment and grace with man as he "in fact is," so that an ellipse with two foci would probably serve best as a model for Luther's theology.

It is to this human end of the ellipse that Ebeling's summary of Luther's understanding of Law calls attention. What one misses in it is a correspondingly explicit reference to the divine end. It says nothing about God as the subject of the Law which discloses and threatens the reality of fallen man. The Law appears to be something given within the structures of existence, operating apart from the action of a divine Giver. Its reference points are horizontal. In Luther, on the other hand, one is always aware of the vertical dimension of the Law's reality. Its effect, of course, is on the plane of

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 75.

human existence , but that is so only because the human plane has been intersected by a divine act. God has spoken a Word of wrath and judgment--usually through the mouth of a preacher. It is this attack extra nos which makes the Law effective. The Law is a "large and powerful hammer," and there can be no doubting that, for Luther, God is ultimately the Wielder, who employs it to smash our self-righteousness.

Furthermore, if the Law is for Luther an "existentialist" category, it seems to me clear that for him it has to do primarily--almost exclusively--with that aspect of man's being where such terms as responsibility, freedom and guilt have relevance. Its point of attack is the conscience. Its presupposition is God's holy Will, written on men's hearts and clearly declared in Scripture, against which men have revolted. Its function, as the Augsburg Confession holds, is "always to accuse." The Law backs man into a corner from which there is no escaping a sense of accountability before God. He knows himself to be judged and must acknowledge that the judgment is just. He is in a state of rebellion against God, a rebellion which manifests itself in defiance of God's commandment to love Him and the neighbor. For this reason, there is an ineradicable ethical dimension to the Law. Religiously, it has to do with my broken relationship with God; ethically, it has to do with my broken relationship with my neighbor. In actuality, the two cannot be separated, for when I am in revolt against God I am inevitably at odds with my neighbor, even as the extent of my enmity to God is manifest in far-ranging and

disastrous violations of love in my relationships with my fellowmen. It is for this reason that the Law will most often awaken me to my condition as sinner before God by confronting me with the knowledge of how in selfishness, dishonesty, lust, and hate I have damaged my fellow man, made in God's image. This is the "reality of fallen man" about which Ebeling writes in the sentence quoted above--a reality for which man must acknowledge his own accountability.

It seems to me that those who speak of the Law in such a way that man's responsibility and culpability before God are underscored are in the direct line of succession from Luther. Thielicke, for example, after raising the query as to whether Luther's question, "How can I find a gracious God?" is relevant for modern man, answers with a strong affirmative. Even though the precise form in which man raises that question may be different today, he is still party to a dialogue with God in which his stance is that of a guilty sinner who tries to conceal behind his back things of which he is ashamed. The judging God before whom I stand "is not God my Friend, simply because I am not His friend."⁵⁹ God transfixes us with a demanding eye that "leads us to hell and back again."⁶⁰ The true nature of our situation before God is not merely that we are finite and He is infinite and that we, therefore, feel our smallness; it is rather that we are "enemies," a state of affairs for which, by reason of our denials and rejections of

⁵⁹ Helmut Thielicke, Out of the Depths (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), p. 53.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 55.

Him, we must assume the full weight of blame.⁶¹ Ultimately, the fact that we raise the question about the whereabouts of a "gracious God" roots in the fact that all along we have been the objects of His altogether radical questioning.⁶²

Gustav Wingren's discussion of Law is in this same tradition. He begins with the premise that all men are subject to the "civil use" of the Law which by force places them in a situation where service of the neighbor is obligatory. Since, however, service of the neighbor is precisely the demand man cannot perfectly fulfill, the "first work of the Law, that of compulsion, is continually passing into the second work of the Law, that of accusation."⁶³ Even men whose secularity no longer allows them to use the name "God" are aware of the accusation against them. It may take the form of a "conviction of the waste they have made of their lives,"⁶⁴ or of the despair which

⁶¹Ibid., p. 57.

⁶²Ebeling also speaks of the radical "questionableness" of man's life, and, though this description applies to every aspect of his existence, it focuses most sharply at the point of conscience: "The suit in which man is involved as one called to responsibility, as one summoned to render account, never comes to an end during this life. For the court of conscience there is no statute of limitations, and no discharged cases. Because man himself is the object of responsibility, the responsibility suit, including also that of responsibility for the past, goes on as long as he lives." Gerhard Ebeling, "Theology and the Evidentness of the Ethical," Journal for Theology and Church, II (1965), 121.

⁶³Gustav Wingren, Creation and Law (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), p. 151.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 56.

follows the collapse of the idols they had thought to set in the place of God.⁶⁵ In such men, for whom God is no longer a living reality, the Law does its spiritual work in the form of an "unrecognized demand" which they feel pressing upon their lives. Unidentified demand would appear to me to be a more accurate designation, since a demand which is "unrecognized" can hardly be said to be experienced. At any rate, one of the consequences of the preaching of Christ is that the demand, hitherto vague and inchoate, becomes "clear and precise," for in Him--all men see the "full realization of their own humanity but also the gulf between this true 'image of God' and the image which they themselves have created in rebellion against the decree of the Creator."⁶⁶ Here, Wingren echoes the contention we have already found in Luther, namely, that the proclamation of the Gospel can itself strike man's heart as Law.

Ragnar Bring, another Scandinavian theologian, shows this same continuity with Luther. He insists on the necessity of preaching the Law today. The preacher must preach Law in order "to make sin manifest and bring it out into the open."⁶⁷ Otherwise, man's real and desperate

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 65.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 194; cf. also pp. 52, 61, 182-183. Cf. also, Karl Barth, God, Grace and Gospel (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1959), p. 8: "We have to learn what is important, what is really meant in each great or small, internal or external commandment, from the fulfillment which each of them has found in Jesus Christ."

⁶⁷ Ragnar Bring, "Preaching the Law," Scottish Journal of Theology, XIII (1960), 14.

need lies unseen. He is able to hide from it. The preaching of the Law, therefore, comes to him as a "revelation"; man's attention is drawn to what is not "obviously and evidently true" about his situation.⁶⁸ But again, the full force of the Law falls upon man only with the preaching of the Gospel. It is, first of all, in Christ that the real meaning of the commandments is revealed. Since the Law's real demand is for a quality of relationship which no listing of commandments can describe, it was necessary for the Law to be fulfilled in a Person before it could be genuinely understood.⁶⁹ Furthermore, only the Gospel can show sin in its absolute depths, for only in the proclamation of the Cross do we see "the sin that forced Christ to go through suffering and death and even to take upon Himself the curse and the condemnation that was laid upon the unrighteousness that the Law forbade."⁷⁰

Even Paul Tillich, who has been a powerful voice in the new interpretation of Law to which we have alluded and to whose formulations in terms of "estrangement" we will return, insists that the word "sin" must be retained in our theological vocabulary because it "has a sharpness which accusingly points to the element of personal responsibility in one's estrangement."⁷¹ Man has not merely been trapped in a

⁶⁸Ibid. Cf. Ebeling, Luther, p. 135: "The preaching of the law only reveals 'what already exists in human nature,' (1537), 'for the law is already there in fact.' (1538)"

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 4. ⁷⁰Ibid., p. 15.

⁷¹Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), II, 46.

universal condition characterized by "tragic fate"; he must see that the personal counterpart to his fate is his own misuse of the gift of freedom. He must bear personal guilt for his condition of estrangement. We should also note here the strong statement of Heinrich Ott, to whose analysis we will likewise refer in dealing with the new interpretation of the Law, that "preaching must hold fast to the theme of guilt, responsibility and freedom, that it must seize man in his actual, personal, responsible situation before God."⁷²

This personal character of guilt is not diminished by the fact that man participates in the collective guilt of society--a fact to which both Tillich and Ott give attention. From the moment of birth, man is pulled into a web of guilt which preceded him and to which he will contribute additional strands. He cannot use the fact that it was there, ready to condition negatively his own responses, as a way of absolving himself from accountability. His situation is that of a willing accomplice, so that a realistic theology must take account of "the solidarity of all [in guilt] and the responsibility of the individual life."⁷³ Thus, while a particular man may not be charged with the crimes of which a community is accused, he is guilty "of contributing to the destiny in which the crimes happened."⁷⁴ His life both is affected by and contributes to the universal reality of rebellion against God, so that he must acknowledge a share of

⁷²Heinrich Ott, Theology and Proclamation (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), pp. 79-80.

⁷³Ibid., p. 83. ⁷⁴Tillich, II, 59.

responsibility, however indirect, for specific acts of revolt.

In all the discussions of Law to this point we are still standing within the central tradition received from the Reformation. The stress is upon the accusatory function of the Law. The target is man's conscience. The goal is to engage man's sense of moral responsibility and to awaken his recognition of culpability for the broken condition of his own life and that of his world. The Law is not functioning merely to describe man's existence "as it in fact is" but to bring man to feel the weight of blame for the fact that his existence is as it is. He is no beast trapped in a plight he did nothing to create; the very point of the Law is to confront him with the fact that he is responsible for his plight. This is the burden of his freedom. Man is accountable and must answer to the One who is the source of the gift he has willfully misused. The Law is God's instrument to bring him to this dreaded moment of accountability. To use Luther's term again, it is a "large and powerful hammer" which God employs, through the preaching of His Word, to break through the defensive walls of man's pride and self-righteousness and into the inner room of his life with the judgment that he is a sinner.

3. The Law as "Mirror of Existence."

We must turn now to a second, more recent line of interpretation of Law which, while it does not negate the understanding which has just been sketched, moves in a visibly different direction. A good point of departure from which to examine it is Tillich's

discussion of estrangement, referred to above. In Tillich's analysis, estrangement is the term chosen to describe the fundamental condition of man in history:

The state of existence is the state of estrangement. Man is estranged from the ground of being, from other beings, and from himself.⁷⁵

The word "estrangement" in itself suggests nothing as to man's responsibility, or lack of it, for his state. In this sense, it is morally neutral. This is why, as we have seen, Tillich argues for the retention of the word "sin" in the theological vocabulary; connotations of personal responsibility are ineradicably part of the concept of sin. But one can speak of estrangement simply in terms of human existence "as it in fact is" or as "tragic fate," without immediate reference to the question of man's responsibility or, ultimately, of God's judgment. While not necessarily closed to the question of guilt, the word "estrangement" is, in fact, one of a cluster of terms used in existentialist literature to describe the human condition. Others which do service in this regard are alienation, meaninglessness, brokenness, finitude, anxiety, despair. It is to be observed that while the question of human accountability or of divine judgment may lurk in their depths, that issue is not apparent on the surface of any of these words. They can be employed with or without such a reference point. They are descriptive of the structures of human existence as such and carry no necessary implication that a vertical dimension of judgment

⁷⁵Ibid., II, 44.

is an element, even the decisive element within them.

It is to this vocabulary that some theologians have turned today in their effort to interpret the meaning of Law. Ott, for example, is quite explicit about what he is doing. He notes that man's existence "in sin and misery is perhaps more strikingly expressed and seized upon by the use of . . . existentialist concepts and terms"⁷⁶ than by a more traditional theological vocabulary, which is often tainted by "moralistic" connotations. Such existentialist terms as "homelessness," "decadence," and "existence in unreality," he proposes, may carry modern man "a real step forward in the recognition of the essential truth" about himself and "therefore be a real help homiletically."⁷⁷ He finds the reality of judgment implied in these terms. "Existence in unreality," for example, points to life bereft of God and this very fact of life in separation from God is man's judgment. Law, when it is seen either as identical with or in "closest possible connection with" the realities of man's life in history, is no longer a "special aspect or theme of proclamation, but its entire all-embracing horizon."⁷⁸ Ott appears to be saying that all the ambiguity and anguish under which the human spirit chafes in this world are to be taken as manifestations of the operation of the Law in his life.

This is close to Tillich's use of the paradoxical term "structure of destruction" to interpret the meaning of traditional language

⁷⁶Ott, p. 59.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 60.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 61.

about the wrath and judgment of God. Wrath and judgment are not to be seen as imposed upon creation from the outside but rather as the out-working of forces of self-destruction consequent upon man's condition of estrangement. Estrangement manifests itself in "self-loss," the "disintegration of the unity of the person."⁷⁹ Likewise, under the condition of estrangement, suffering becomes a destructive evil and death is turned from a "universal tragic actuality" into a condition for which man feels responsible.⁸⁰ Anxiety is heightened, and man finds himself burdened with an intolerable loneliness which he tries to assuage by surrendering himself to collectives.⁸¹ Insecurity and doubt become absolute, until man is driven to despair, which is "the final index of [his] predicament . . . the boundary line beyond which man cannot go."⁸² Here, in more specific and concrete terms than Ott employs, are delineated the realities of man's life in history, of which the concept "Law" is to be taken as a symbol.

Such an analysis of man's situation seems to me to reflect a shift from the Reformation tradition with regard to the Law and its use. The sickness man carries in the roots of his being is not only guilt (though that is not excluded) but includes also such realities as alienation, doubt, finitude, anxiety and despair, about which it is possible to speak in descriptive rather than judgmental terms. For

⁷⁹Tillich, II, 61.

⁸⁰Ibid., II, 67.

⁸¹Ibid., II, 71-72.

⁸²Ibid., II, 75.

these ills, man needs to hear from the message of the Gospel not so much a word whose accent is forgiveness as a word whose accent is hope or healing. The nature of this shift is exemplified in Tillich's translation of the Reformation watchword "he who sins is justified" into "he who doubts is justified," for the situation of doubt has become a characteristic one for modern man, and we need assurance that even "doubt about God, need not separate us from God."⁸³ Doubt is an aspect of "the boundary situation" upon which man always stands, and, in Tillich's view, it is the first duty of proclamation in Protestantism so to lay this situation bare that man will no longer be able to escape from the recognition of his threatened existence into various secular or religious securities.⁸⁴

In summary, this second interpretation of the Law differs from the classic Reformation interpretation in being more descriptive than judgmental. Its function is not so much to accuse as to expose. It does not speak directly of man's moral responsibility but rather of his inescapable fate. It awakens awareness, self-recognition, rather than guilt. Its target is not the conscience but man's consciousness of himself and of his true situation in the world. If Luther's "hammer" is the appropriate symbol for the classic interpretation of the use of the Law, then Tillich's image of the "mirror" is the

⁸³Paul Tillich, The Protestant Era (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. xiv.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 195.

appropriate symbol for this second interpretation.⁸⁵ The aim is not to batter down the walls of self-righteousness through blows of accusation but to hold up such an authentic view of the structures of existence that a man will not fail to see there the reflection of himself.

What we must do, and can do successfully, is to show the structures of anxiety, of conflicts, of guilt. These structures, which are effective because they mirror what we are, are in us, and if we are right, they are in other people also. If we bring these structures before them, it is as if we held up a mirror in which they see themselves.⁸⁶

Finally, it must be stressed that these two ways of judgment and description, of the "hammer" and the "mirror" are not mutually contradictory. We have already noted Tillich's insistence upon the retention of the word "sin" to point up the fact that, while man's condition of estrangement has a tragic and universal character, it also includes a personal dimension for which he must bear responsibility. Furthermore, it must be recognized that any comprehensive description of the human condition will include aspects of existence which we have discussed under the category of the Law as judgment.

⁸⁵It is interesting to note that Luther, on at least one occasion, used this image of the "mirror," albeit in connection with the accusatory function of the law: "Thus we read Moses not because he applies to us, but because he agrees with the natural law and is conceived better than the Gentiles ever have been able to do. Thus the ten commandments are a mirror [italics mine] of our life, in which we can see wherein we are lacking" Martin Luther, "How Christians Should Regard Moses" (1525), in his Works, XXV, 172-173.

⁸⁶Paul Tillich, Theology of Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 203-204.

Guilt, as well as such marks as alienation, anxiety and despair, characterizes "man's being as it in fact is." Existentialist literature also stresses the crucial importance of man's decision-making capacity, thereby underscoring such qualities as freedom and responsibility as against all forms of determinism. Thus, much that we have discussed under the heading "the Law as judgment" could also be embraced within the heading "the Law as description of existence." Our intention in distinguishing between these two aspects of the Law has not been to separate them sharply or to deny their interrelationship. It has been rather to point to the fact that, on the one hand, there is an interpretation of the Law which, in closest continuity with the tradition of the Reformation, focuses on man's conscience and sees the Law's task as accusatory; at the same time, there is an interpretation of Law in which the focus is upon the given structures of man's existence, with a purpose more accurately designated as "description" than "accusation" or "judgment." It will be seen in the following chapter that both the "hammer" of judgment and the "mirror" of description have their place in the preaching of the Law today, to the end that those who hear will, in Luther's words, find the Law to be "a most useful servant impelling us to Christ." Thus, while their point of contact in man's life may differ, the ultimate goal to which they mean to lead him is the same.

C. CRITERIA FOR PREACHING LAW TODAY

Having surveyed Luther's concept of the Law and having looked at some recent interpretations of this theological category, we are now

in a position to suggest several criteria which can serve as guidelines for the preaching of Law today. They will also provide a basis for appraising, in the chapter which follows, the adequacy with which Hoffmann and Steimle articulate the Law in their preaching.

1. The Law will be preached in order to confront men with their accountability for their lives.

This is the mode of preaching Law we found to be dominant in the Reformation tradition. Its most adequate symbol is Luther's "hammer of judgment." It is the Law fulfilling an accusatory function. The target of such preaching is the conscience. It addresses man at the point where he must answer for his life. Its effect is to break down self-justification and bring guilt to consciousness. The establishing of such a criterion for preaching Law today implies agreement with Thielicke's contention that Luther's question, "How can I find a gracious God?" (whatever the form in which the question reaches expression today), is not obsolete in terms of what it says about the human condition.

2. The preaching of Law today will be more concerned with the underlying sin which corrupts men's lives than with its surface manifestations.

Luther, as we have seen, identified this core sin as unbelief, or unfaith. Clustered closely around it are pride and egocentricity. Ultimately, the preacher will be concerned to have his hearers face

sin at this root level of their lives. At the same time, he will not be indifferent to the varied ways in which this fundamental sin reaches expression. To ignore the actualities of sin in its concrete forms is to become docetic in preaching. On the other hand, to give exclusive attention to specific "sins" is to become moralistic. The preacher of Law will try to trace visible manifestations of sin back to their hidden source in the depths of the self.

3. The preaching of Law today will take into account men's involvement in social evil as well as more directly personal expressions of sin.

Luther himself gives little, if any, attention to this dimension of sin. In a society where individual roles were far more sharply circumscribed than now, the masses of men could not have been expected to feel much responsibility for the direction of society as a whole. Today, however, when the citizenry can help shape the contours of political and economic institutions, men must be alerted to the broader social consequences of their actions (or inaction). Here, Ott and Tillich are representative of a consensus in theology with regard to "the solidarity of all" in responsibility for the massive ills of our age.

4. The Law will be preached today in order to bring into consciousness the "dark underside" of man's existence.

For this mode of preaching Law, the symbol, "mirror of existence," is more appropriate than "hammer of judgment." It points not

to a sentence delivered against us from above our existence but to a threat that arises out of the actualities of our existence. The preacher sets out not to accuse his listeners but to evoke their self-recognition. His aim is not primarily to make a man feel guilty but to help him remove the masks behind which he hides his real face from the world and from himself. The consequence for the hearer may not be the confession that he is "by nature sinful and unclean" but the acknowledgement that at the deepest levels of his life he is anxious, fragmented and lonely.

While this motif in the understanding of Law is not absent from Luther, we have noted that it has become a dominant theme only in recent years. Here, again, we found important clues in the formulations of Ott and Tillich. The establishing of this criterion signifies the writer's agreement with Ott in his contention, noted above, that modern man is more apt to recognize his situation when it is described in existentialist categories than in those drawn strictly from the traditional language of sin and guilt.

5. The preacher of Law will find in the Gospel itself a powerful proclamation of Law.

This insight, as we have seen, was an important feature in Luther's understanding of Law. It has been reiterated in our own time by Bring and others. In the preaching of the Cross, the event through which God's suffering love for man finds its ultimate expression, judgment is implicit. The crucifixion of Jesus becomes the act which

reveals to us the full potentiality of our evil. Furthermore, in the preaching of the Resurrection, the event in which the triumph of life over death and love over hate finds its ultimate symbol, judgment is implicit. The resurrection of Jesus becomes the sign which makes us aware of the defeats of life and love in our own existence.

6. The preaching of Law will not be an end in itself but will serve the purpose of the Gospel.

This strictly instrumental nature of the Law is clear in Luther's familiar statement about its purpose: "to show us our sin and drive us to Christ." Whether as "accusation" or as "description," the Word of the Law is never terminal in the Christian sermon. The Law is preached only so that the Gospel may be heard. It is always prolegomenon. This has important implications for the self-understanding of the preacher when he delivers the Word as Law. His role is not that of a prosecuting attorney, struggling to achieve a verdict of "guilty" against his hearers. He is more like a skillful surgeon who knows he must cut in order to heal.

CHAPTER II

THE PREACHING OF LAW IN HOFFMANN AND STEIMLE

We have now reached the point at which we can begin an analysis of the preaching of Law and Gospel in two contemporary American Lutheran preachers--Oswald Hoffmann and Edmund Steimle. In this chapter, our focus will be limited to the preaching of Law. We will look for expressions of the Law both as the "hammer of judgment" and the "mirror of existence." The first two sections of the chapter will be a descriptive study of a representative sampling of sermons by Hoffman and Steimle, each section dealing with one of the two modes of preaching the Law just noted. A final section will offer an appraisal, based on the criteria listed at the close of Chapter I, of the adequacy with which these two preachers give homiletical expression to the Law.

A. THE LAW AS "HAMMER OF JUDGMENT"

First, our attention will be directed to the preaching of Law as judgment, with a further division of this theme into the areas of judgment upon personal offense and judgment upon participation in social evil. Participation in social evil is, of course, at the same time personal offense, just as there is no personal manifestation of sin which does not have social ramifications. The distinction made here is between the preaching of judgment which, on the one hand, lays stress upon moral failure in one's own immediate and direct

relationships and that which, on the other hand, lays the stress upon corporate evil to which individual men contribute their portion. In the first instance, each man is arbitrarily isolated from the institutions of which he is a part and forced to look inward at the roots of sin in himself. In the second instance, the individual man is required to look outward at the massive and long-range consequences of his sin, as it is linked with and multiplied by the sin of other men in the larger structures of society. In either case, the response hoped for in the preaching of Law as judgment is the listener's deeply personal confession, "God, be merciful to me a sinner" (Lk. 18:13).

1. Judgment upon Personal Offense.

a. Oswald Hoffmann. In three of the Hoffmann sermons, the theme of judgment upon personal offense fairly preempts the message, and one comes away with the sense of having been subjected to a sustained and accurate attack, only slightly relieved by brief references to the Gospel. The first of these sermons, "The Sanctity of Human Life," was preached in the aftermath of the assassination of Robert Kennedy. Its text is the sixth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," (Exodus 20:13), and its point of departure is the devaluation of human life in our society, of which the Kennedy assassination is a glaring symbol. Having established this general background, however, the preacher shifts attention from murder as an act of physical violence to the more subtle kind of destructiveness that issues from hatred and anger. He cites Jesus' re-interpretation of the Law in the Sermon on

the Mount, in which he traces the roots of concrete acts of murder to murderous thoughts and feelings within the human heart (Matthew 5:21-24). Above all, Hoffmann is intent upon establishing the point that since God is the author of the commandment which decrees the sanctity of human life, every violation of that sanctity is an offense against God:

Yet the attack goes on, the attack upon man, which is really an attack upon God. Some people, it is true, have become too sophisticated to engage in overt acts of violence. They succeed in disguising even from themselves their own inner feelings of hatred and violence. So the attack goes on. Whenever you permit yourself to reject another man and wish that he would simply go away and disappear from the area of life in which you are engaged, you are at that moment in rebellion against the sovereignty of your Creator. The moment you rule a man out of your life because he is of a different color or because he is in trouble, poverty, or despair, you have run right up against God. Whenever you harden yourself against other members in your family or other people in the community, you reject God Himself and His saving purpose in the world. Let's face it: rejecting God is the human way!¹

The climax of judgment is reached when Hoffmann declares that blame for the Crucifixion itself must be laid at the feet of "righteous people-- righteous in their own conceits, as so many are today who have tried to absolve themselves of all responsibility for making the world what it is, a den of violence where human life comes cheap."²

The other two sermons throughout which judgment upon personal offense is an overriding theme have to do with family life. The first, "The Price of Permissiveness," pillories a family pattern which

¹Oswald Hoffmann, "The Sanctity of Human Life," p. 4. All of Hoffmann's sermons are printed by (St. Louis: Lutheran Laymen's League, 1968).

²Ibid., p. 5.

Hoffmann sees to be dominant in American society and which he declares to be in direct violation of the biblical norm. Ephesians 6:14, with its stress upon the obedience children owe their parents and the obligation of parents to rule their households wisely and firmly, is his text. He charges that "over-permissiveness is really a crime committed by parents against their children,"³ and he finds it lying at the source of many of the difficulties of youth today--rebelliousness, educational underachievement, sexual libertinism. In general, parents today have been guilty of "following Dr. Spock and forgetting about the Son of God, listening to all the baby care books and forgetting about the Bible, avoiding hurt to their children and driving them to rebellion."⁴ In the preacher's eyes, this coddling of children is foolish as well as reprehensible; in the end it only succeeds in damaging the very relationship it was mistakenly intended to preserve:

Children are not impressed with the kind of parental permissiveness which makes it quite clear that parents don't care what their children do or how they turn out. Nor are they impressed with parents who do not have the inner strength to make the hard moral decisions that have to be made.

All too often parents are too permissive with their children because they are too permissive with themselves. Children have an instinctive feeling about this. They don't respect parents who are not willing to demand a price of their children, because they are not willing to pay that price themselves.⁵

Changes are rung on this same theme in the sermon, "Phony Families." A "phony father" is one who refuses to assume the

³Oswald Hoffmann, "The Price of Permissiveness," p. 2.

⁴Ibid., p. 5. ⁵Ibid.

responsibility for the discipline and guidance of his children which his parental office entails. A "phony marriage" is one in which the partners who enter it "just want to be loved by someone else instead of giving active love themselves."⁶ A general sign of the "phoniness" of families today is their tendency to turn values upside down, so that the highest goals many parents set before their children are a high paying job, marriage to a wealthy partner and membership in all the right clubs. By giving support to such an inverted value scale, "parents who are phonies" have turned finely furnished houses into "spiritual slums."

Two of Hoffmann's prime targets for the accusatory thrusts of the Law are hypocrisy among Christians and self-righteousness among men in general. Hypocrisy is apparent in people who "like to think they can give God His due, and still act as if He doesn't matter."⁷ They harbor an illusion that they can satisfy God by speaking complimentary words about Him and by engaging in superficial acts of piety, but all the while their actions are declaring: "God is One Who does not exist."⁸ Hoffmann points to the great gulf between Christian profession and Christian practice:

Christian people pray, 'Forgive us as we forgive others,' and then they don't talk to each other. Christian people sing hymns and say prayers, only to go out of church to talk bitterly against others. Some of the nastiest things I have ever heard

⁶ Oswald Hoffmann, "Phony Families," p. 4.

⁷ Oswald Hoffmann, "Dwelling in Tents," p. 1

⁸ Ibid.

in my life have been said by Christian people. Looking at Christ's people in the modern world, one has to say that some of them, at least, don't look any different from the world around them.⁹

Serious as the problem of hypocrisy may be, it is self-righteousness which, in Hoffmann's eyes, qualifies as "probably the sin of our age." It manifests itself both inside and outside the church in the frantic efforts of people to avoid facing the reality of guilt. A man will wiggle in every direction to keep from being pinned against the wall. He will speak of "maladjustment" instead of "sin." Even running off with a neighbor's wife is no longer "wicked"; it is merely a quest for "fulfillment." It isn't the task of the preacher to manufacture guilt in the hearts of those who listen to him. No preacher is persuasive enough for that. His task is rather to help people understand the source and extent of the guilt that is already ineradicably present in their hearts, no matter how desperately they try to hide it: "The guilt is there, with its clammy hand on the heart of every man simply because he is a man."¹⁰ In any event, the self-righteous Pharisee, with his tendency to "put a halo around his own head" is, in Hoffmann's mind, "probably the most common religious type running around loose today."¹¹

⁹Oswald Hoffmann, "Take Heart," p. 4.

¹⁰Oswald Hoffmann, "Healing In Christ: For Yourself," p. 3.

¹¹Oswald Hoffmann, "Stuck on Yourself," pp. 4, 2.

Hoffmann's predilection for preaching the Law as moral judgment is also evident in his tendency to establish immediate links between man's existential condition and his personal responsibility for creating that condition. The brokenness and divisions which characterize modern society are traced directly to man's primordial disobedience in the Garden and constitute the inevitable consequence of trying "to live apart from God."

Humanity is a world of spinning tops; each man thinks only of himself. Little individual tops, preventing the creation of real community. Big tops: one clan up in arms against the other; one power against another power. All these turning round and round themselves in a closed circle. Detaching ourselves from God we have destroyed love; we have destroyed all true liberty and human relationships.¹²

In another sermon, instead of describing at length the condition of alienation which marks man in his life in the world, Hoffmann at once speaks accusingly of man the "separator"--the one who must shoulder the responsibility for the broken lines of communication between himself and his fellows and between himself and God.

The problem with man is that he is always destroying the connections. By nature man is a separator. He separates himself from God and from others; at the same time, he barricades himself against God and against others. He cuts God out of his life as if God were an enemy, and he does the same thing to other people.¹³

This same inclination toward judgment operates when Hoffmann handles the subject of death. In a sermon, "Why Die?," Hoffmann

¹²Oswald Hoffmann, "Healing In Christ: You and God," p. 4.

¹³Oswald Hoffmann, "Get the Connection?", p. 3.

describes the omnipresence of death in our modern world and the desperate efforts of most people to shut its brutal reality out of their consciousness. He does not move at once, however, to a proclamation of the Christian hope. He rather takes time to develop the Pauline statement that "the sting of death is sin." Death would be no problem for us, he argues, if it were not for our enmity against the will of God. But because sin and guilt are present in us, death itself becomes a hostile power, carrying "its own sharp, pointed, devastating reminder that something within us puts us at odds with God, with our fellow men, with ourselves, and even with life itself."¹⁴ Hoffmann states the case still more boldly in a sermon, "The Surprise Verdict," based on the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard. He has just been attacking the self-sufficient man who is sure he can make his own way to God and that nothing will ever bring him to his knees. But,

...this talk becomes sheer bravado when a man comes face to face finally with the last enemy, which is death. Nothing may bring you to your knees, my friend, but something some day is going to put you flat on your back, out flat, out cold. Forgive me for mentioning the cold facts so brutally. They put all life in perspective. In that perspective, where you see things as they really are, the grace of God comes into proper focus; the generosity of God becomes important; the forgiveness of God becomes imperative.¹⁵

These last sentences exhibit another characteristic of Hoffmann's preaching of judgment: his blunt style. Punches are not pulled but aimed straight at the chin. The language is frank and

¹⁴Oswald Hoffmann, "Why Die?", p. 3.

¹⁵Oswald Hoffmann, "The Surprise Verdict," p. 5.

direct, sometimes "brutally" so. We have already encountered this in his blast against "phony families." This battering quality appears throughout the sermons, and its force is increased by his frequent use of the second personal pronoun. On repentance, he declares:

If you are one of those fat cats living off other people, now is the time for change. If you are a griper and a complainer, who thinks he earns too little and suffers too much, now is the time for change.¹⁶

Again, in a sermon on the healing of the paralytic, in which Jesus declares, "Son, take heart; your sins are forgiven you";

Don't just sit there as if this were some theological hokum proclaimed by a preacher. This is the Lord of heaven and earth talking to you. He knows you a lot better than you know yourself. He is not bamboozled by all your pretense, and He is not taken in by all the fine feathered defenses you have built up around yourself. He knows you, and He knows what you need, more than anything else in the whole world.¹⁷

In short, this preacher is intent upon facing every man, "the apple of God's eye turned sour,"¹⁸ with the charge, simple and blunt as a hammer, "you are a sinner."¹⁹

b. Edmund Steinle. Steinle's prime target in preaching judgment is, to put it briefly, the failure of Christians to "let God be God." Religious people especially have, in his mind, a peculiar addiction to creating God in their own image, trying to mould Him to

¹⁶Oswald Hoffmann, "The Greatest Change of All," p. 4.

¹⁷Oswald Hoffmann, "Which Is Easier?", pp. 3-4.

¹⁸Hoffmann, "Get the Connection?", p. 1.

¹⁹Hoffmann, "Why Die?", p. 3.

fit the pattern of their own too small designs, attempting to confine His limitless grace and power within the narrow boundaries of their own constricted affections and expectations. The disastrous product of all this is "the man who thinks he has God at the end of a string"²⁰ and is sure that he can manipulate God for the securing of his own self-centered purposes. Steimle returns to this theme in sermon after sermon, lifting up now one aspect of it and now another.

At its center, this narrowing tendency has to do with how we relate to God, or fail to relate to Him. A paragraph in a sermon on the parable of the Empty House affords a look into the substance of Steimle's preaching of judgment, while, at the same time, providing a sample of the style in which he characteristically casts his critique. He has been working with the analogy (one of his favorite illustrative devices) of the cautious landlord who confronts prospective tenants with a long list of house rules and conditions which are designed to insure quiet, undisturbing occupants for his rooms. Then he draws the implications:

So our Christian views of God as a prospective tenant: I welcome him into the house of my soul, of course, so long as he observes my house rules. I want it understood that I want no discomfort or disturbance in the way I run my life. I don't want to change my habits; if I have a few prejudices I don't intend to change them. I shall expect a reasonable amount of 'peace of mind'; I don't want to lie awake nights worrying about the problems of the world or the state of my own soul; I have worries enough as it is. If God wants to move into my house under those conditions, I'll be more than happy to have him as a tenant and will, on my part, do

²⁰ Edmund A. Steimle, Are You Looking for God? (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), p. 73.

what I can to make his stay with me agreeable And I suppose some would be utterly amazed to learn that God never did move in under those terms or any other terms.²¹

This theme receives sustained treatment in a sermon entitled, "This Is The Life," based on Psalm 18:18b-19a: "The Lord was my stay. He brought me forth also into a large place." The phrase "a large place" becomes a symbol for the "roominess," the "spaciousness" which faith introduces into life. In fact, salvation is described as "a vast roominess under God."²² But Christians have taken this gift and shrunk it into something small and spare. Christ's broad sympathies have reappeared in them as "a provincial concern for respectability." The high demands which he laid upon human life have been reduced to petty, negative morality. His mighty and boundless faith in God has been "compressed" into lifeless subscription to theological formulations. We have managed the miracle of making "of this exultant spaciousness the dull, cramped business of placing one cautious and respectable foot in front of another. . . ."²³ We have kept "God at his distance" rather than let him come into the center of our existence where He might trample on "the well-cultivated gardens of our lives which are so concerned with me and mine, my interests, my family, my kind of people."²⁴ There is in us, as Steimle notes in another sermon, too little of the extravagance of love and the joyous abandon to life which are so clearly present in the New Testament

²¹Ibid., pp. 81-82.

²²Ibid., p. 115.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., p. 117.

revelation of God in Christ. Children have some of this spirit, but the passing years tend to rob us of it. Our horizons close in; our "breadth of life contracts":

We take ourselves so seriously that we cannot conceive of a God who is not as serious-minded and cautiously ponderous as we are. Our sin, if you like, lies precisely at the point where we refuse to become the children of God because it is beneath our dignity.²⁵

Another aspect of this scaling down of the dimensions of Christian faith and life to which Steimle gives attention is the tendency toward exclusivism. A sermon on Jonah, "The Reluctant Prophet," gives him an opportunity to lay under judgment this constriction of love in our lives. Sometimes our exclusivism rears its head precisely in the realm of religion. We begin to hold our "beliefs" so dogmatically that before long we are "convinced that we have God all neatly tucked away in our vest pocket," and we arrogate to ourselves the right to draw lines around those who fall inside and outside God's circle of concern.²⁶ Sometimes, and especially today, the exclusive spirit manifests itself in racial barriers. In the sermon, "This Is the Life!," Steimle uses the central image of Robert Frost's "Mending Wall" to attack the prejudices which divide men from each other:

With the stones of prejudice and the brick of pride, they fence around so neatly their little patches of mediocrity: 'We are white! We are Protestant. My family traces its ancestry back. . . .'²⁷

²⁵ Ibid., p. 151. ²⁶ Ibid., p. 92.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 116.

In fact, one diagnosis for the sickness of the church in contemporary America is that it has "domesticated" the "mystery of Christ," which Paul exalts in the hymnic sentences of Ephesians 3:1-21. Steimle charges the church with losing the element of "wonder and surprise," which must always lurk in faith, in a mass of dull programs designed to bring calculable results. In a sermon on the parable of the Sower and the Seed, he contrasts "God's incredible optimism," symbolized in the figure of the sower scattering his seed without regard to where it falls, with the spectacle of the church pulling

. . . out of changing neighborhoods because the results are discouraging and the future looks bleak; making careful, fact-finding surveys before opening up a new congregation lest we waste the church's money; . . . limiting the attention we give to some people because the prospects don't look very favorable for response. . . . But isn't it dreary? This cautious, calculating eye always looking for measurable results?²⁸

On the other hand, as Steimle makes clear in an Easter sermon, "No Idle Tale," contemporary Christians are also capable of a "shallow and optimistic caricature of Christianity" which runs little deeper than the canned Easter messages supplied by Western Union, e.g., "Here's hello from your Easter bunny. May your day be happy, bright and sunny."²⁹ They skip what lies between the joyous festivals of Christmas and Easter and end up with a Christianity in which there is "no struggle in the wilderness, no curses or jeers, no bloody sweat, no dead and buried, no cross!"³⁰ The fact is, we are fearful of "the

²⁸Edmund A. Steimle, Disturbed by Joy (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), p. 138.

²⁹Steimle, Are You Looking for God? p. 141. ³⁰Ibid., p. 140.

explosive power of Easter" and what it might require of us if we took its message seriously.

Related to his judgment upon the failure of Christians to "let God be God," is Steimle's designation of "unbelief" as the chief of sins. In a sermon on the healing of the paralytic, "Arise and Walk," Steimle scores our failure to believe that God really means His promise to give us abundant life precisely in the midst of the ordinary life we now live. We succumb to the delusion that the meaning of life always lies somewhere else, beyond our everyday circumstances--perhaps in a change of locale or a better job. But the essence of sin is the desire to escape our present circumstances, because we do not trust enough God's power to fill them with value and significance:

Is not sin the denial that in the middle of the dish-pan, the assembly line, the paper work in the office, the drudgery of preparing for examinations, or in the period of military service--that precisely there is the abundant life, the joy our Lord promised to us which, as someone puts it, is 'worn by the believer like a halo as unfelt as his hair'?³¹

Steimle develops a similar theme in his interpretation of the parable of the talents. His focus is on the "one talent man," in whom he finds the image of all the obscure people in the world--"the anonymous city dweller" who needn't be so careful about integrity, since nobody will be the wiser; the assembly line worker, "replaceable as a flat tire"; the stockholder of a large corporation who cashes his dividend check but feels no responsibility for the company's policies;

³¹ Ibid., p. 36.

the "occasional" churchmen who stay clear of responsibilities in church and community, because there's always somebody else to do the job. Multitalented people have their special temptations, but the peculiar temptation of one-talent people is to grade themselves poorly in order to avoid risks, to hide "behind the skirts of their littleness" in "cringing self-debasement," like the man in the parable who buried his money in the earth. They refuse to believe that God has any real use for them, and then make a virtue of their disbelief. But Steimle proceeds to smoke out this coward who hides in all of us. It is one of the few passages of judgment in which he shifts to the second person:

You now! With that one talent of yours--or perhaps it's two! The spotlight shifts from this fearful, cautious little man in the parable and turns its glare on you. Naturally, it would be more convenient if we could work the spotlight. . . . But God handles the spotlight despite our feeble, fluttery protests about how we're not very much; he keeps turning it back on you! He wants to know what you've done and what you're doing now with your God-given opportunities.³²

2. Judgment Upon Participation in Social Evil.

In both Hoffmann and Steimle, the passages in which judgment is brought to bear upon participation in social evil are relatively few and scattered. Though neither man ignores the social implications of the Christian message, it is clear that the primary concern of both is for man in the more personal dimensions of his existence. Only one of the sermons studied was devoted in its entirety to the treatment of a

³²Ibid., p. 100.

social issue. Where judgment was directed to the larger areas of public affairs, it almost always occurred within the context of a sermon whose major thrust was toward issues of a more personal nature.

One question to which both men give some attention--though much less than would be anticipated today--is that of race prejudice and the struggle for civil rights. We have already noted Steimle's use of Frost's "Mending Wall" to strike at the barriers we raise up against each other in our pluralistic society. He gives further attention to this issue in a Palm Sunday sermon, "God's Surprises," in which a major point is God's surprising way of bringing His promises to fulfillment through the suffering of His servants. Naturally, we resist this strange way of God's working, and Steimle refers to the present civil rights struggle as one of our chief areas of resistance. The promise of equal rights is deep within the American dream and is inscribed in our national documents, but,

. . . a large, bitter segment in America--which includes most of us at one time or another--is unwilling to accept the fulfillment of the promise on the terms of death to a way of life which denies the fulfillment of the promise. So they sing their hosannas on July 4 in praise of The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, but cry 'crucify' when the fulfillment means death to their way of life in segregated schools, labor unions, suburbs, summer resorts, motels, to say nothing of churches.³³

Hoffmann makes only two references to the race question in the sermons examined and both are of a rather general character. In the one, he points to hatred between races as one of the chief manifestations of the brokenness of the world today and notes that "all it

³³ Steimle, Disturbed by Joy, p. 68.

takes to set the teeth of some people on edge these days is to be different from them in the color of your skin."³⁴ In the sermon, noted earlier, in which he deals with man "the separator," he refers again to racism--both white and black--as one of the ways in which people "cut themselves off from each other . . . insulating themselves behind walls where constructive conversation and wholesome confrontation are no longer possible."³⁵ At no point does he deal with actual structures of injustice to which racist attitudes contribute and from which they spring.

One sermon in which Hoffmann does devote more sustained and specific attention to the public realm is entitled, "Hope Not in Politicians." Its text is Isaiah 31:1-3, with its counsel for Israel not to rely on the horses and chariots of Egypt. He does include in the sermon the predictable homiletical appeal to trust in God rather than in the power of human wisdom to resolve current problems, but he also has some forceful words to speak against those who are cynical about the political realm. He affirms politics as a legitimate vocation and only warns politicians against the delusion that they have taken over control of the world from God. His sternest words, however, are reserved for the citizenry of the nation. He does not deny that there is corruption and greed among politicians, but he reminds his hearers that in this regard the leaders only reflect the general moral

³⁴Oswald Hoffmann, "Healing In Christ: You and Others," p. 3.

³⁵Hoffmann, "Get the Connection?", p. 4.

tone of the society:

Politicians can't do anything about the problems of the world when people regard their purpose as simply the acquisition of things until they die, or look upon their destiny as control of others for their own selfish purpose When people act like animals crowding one another away from the feeding trough of an advanced technology, politicians are going to go along with the whole process. The end of that process is death.³⁶

Steimle in a sermon, "Even the Winds and the Sea," scores one specific instance of greed in the public realm: the exploitation of our natural resources. The sermon is based on Matthew 8:23-27, the account of the stilling of the storm. He finds in this miracle-story an affirmation of Christ's lordship over nature as well as history and charges that, when this conviction of Christ's lordship is lost, nature becomes the happy-hunting-ground of all who are obsessed with turning its wonders and beauties into wealth:

If there is nothing but an 'intelligence' behind the created world around us, why should not we too apply our intelligence, our wits and brains, to use it as we please? And generally we 'please' to turn it all into dollars as fast as we can. Why is it that the conservation of our natural resources, whether forests or fish, wildlife or oil, always has such an uphill battle, if it is not that we have divorced Christ from nature?³⁷

Steimle also on a few occasions directs a judging word to the area of international affairs. In the Palm Sunday sermon referred to above he rebukes our tendency to look for "easy, simple and clear-cut solution(s)" in the massive and complex relationships among nations. Usually this impatience involves recourse to violence, he notes,

³⁶Oswald Hoffmann, "Hope Not in Politicians," p. 4.

³⁷Steimle, Disturbed by Joy, p. 48.

rather than the patient, plodding way of negotiation. The sermon on Jonah, "the Reluctant Prophet," likewise provides Steimle with an opportunity to address the international scene. He takes Jonah's futile effort to escape God as a symbol of the fact that nations and civilizations, no more than individuals, can avoid reckoning at last with the God of history. He sees an example of such a reckoning in the devastations which ushered in the Atomic Age. Scientists had gone "merrily about their research," contending that they had no responsibility for the moral consequences of their discoveries, and "the rest of us stood around and nodded agreement."

So it went in our world until a cloud, somewhat larger than a man's hand, appeared on the horizon in the shape of a mushroom and Hiroshima lay in ruins And strangely, we felt guilty. God had caught up with our flight into the ivory tower of scientific progress whence only good can come!³⁸

The preacher sees a similar "moment of truth" in the revolutions exploding in Africa and Asia. After centuries of exploitation by the white man, the colored peoples are rising in revolt. Talk of a Communist threat in those areas must not be allowed to cloud the fundamental issue; an evil system is tottering in the judgments of history:

God has caught up with us Christian white people in the storm over Africa and Asia. There is no escape from God. You know it and so do I.³⁹

³⁸ Steimle, Are You Looking for God? p. 87.

³⁹ Ibid.

B. THE LAW AS "MIRROR OF EXISTENCE"

1. Oswald Hoffman.

We have already noted Hoffmann's strong preference for the "hammer" function of the Law. This is not to say, however, that he neglects entirely that use to which more recent theological interpretations of the Law point--its function as a "mirror" of existence. Sometimes at the beginning of a sermon he will delineate some "structure of destruction" to which he will subsequently address the Gospel's Word of hope. Occasionally, these descriptions of human existence in its brokenness are rather extended and include quick references to a type of person in whom the brokenness is embodied. Hoffmann's way of preaching Law as "description of existence" will become more clear as we note how he treats such typical existentialist categories as alienation, despair, meaninglessness and transiency..

a. Alienation. Several paragraphs at the beginning of the sermon, "Healing In Christ: You and God," are devoted to portraying the alienation people experience in the modern world, though Hoffmann never employs that existentialist term. He prefers to speak of "brokenness," or of the simple fact that a man can "suddenly find himself a stranger in the world, misunderstood, friendless, forsaken."⁴⁰

⁴⁰Hoffmann, "Healing In Christ: You and God," p. 2. This sermon is actually the first of a series of three under the general theme "Healing In Christ." The other sub-titles are: "For Yourself" and "You and Others."

He acknowledges that a man can bring such a condition upon himself, but he knows also that his sense of isolation can be present through no apparent fault of his own: "It is the pain of our world, and a mark of its brokenness."⁴¹ He builds up the impression of man's alienation largely through a series of one sentence vignettes: a company president who suddenly discovers that his associates are ranged against him, a widow abruptly bereft of her life partner, a person who has been betrayed by a trusted friend, a jilted lover, a man who finds long-buried resentments tearing apart the fabric of his family. In short, there is "a brokenness in the world that steals upon people and makes them feel as if they were strangers in their own world, of which they once were so sure and in which they had felt so secure."⁴² Such alienated people are flesh and blood examples of A. B. Housman's lines, which the preacher quotes at the beginning of the sermon:

And how am I to face the odds
Of man's bedevilment and God's?
I, a stranger and afraid,
In a world I never made.

Hoffmann traces the roots of this alienation men experience on the human plane to a fundamental alienation from God, for which they must bear responsibility. The present situation is one in which the relationships of life are disturbed at every level, with the result

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid. In the second sermon in this series, "For Yourself," Hoffmann uses Willie Loman in Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman as a symbol of the alienated man.

that "faithlessness and fear," the "demons of brokenness," are "roaming around in the world, haunting people everywhere."⁴³ A widespread and indefinable dread spreads across human life, a deep anxiety which is a mark of "the brokenness of life without God."

b. Despair. Despair is by no means a dominant feature of Hoffmann's description of existence, but on two occasions he does refer to it. A sketch of despair serves, for example, as a dark backdrop against which he preaches on the theme, "Saved by Hope." Despair, he says, is widespread in our society. People are constantly finding their lives "broken up in mid-stream . . . as they hit the rocks of unforeseen misfortune and unexpected disaster beyond their control."⁴⁴ If it is not personal tragedy that knocks them off their feet, then evils of almost apocalyptic dimensions--"wars and rumors of wars, cataclysms of nature and catastrophies in the nations, signs in the heavens and the apparent silence of God on earth."⁴⁵

In only one other sermon, "A Tough Profession," does he touch briefly on despair as an aspect of the human condition. In the opening paragraph, he quotes a sentence from the letter of a soldier in Vietnam: "We will go to heaven because we have already been in hell." Hoffmann finds that sentence paradigmatic of the truth of existence in many settings other than a battlefield:

⁴³Ibid., p. 4.

⁴⁴Oswald Hoffmann, "Saved by Hope," p. 2.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 3.

In more peaceful surroundings, a lot of people have experienced this same thing; the same feeling, the same loneliness, the same despair. Some of them have made a mess of their lives through their own mistakes; others live under handicaps for which they themselves cannot be held wholly or even partially responsible. They look for help and there is no one.⁴⁶

c. Meaninglessness. Meaninglessness, or a sense of confusion about life's ultimate purpose, is another existentialist theme which receives some, though minimal, attention from Hoffmann. He notes the jumble of values which characterizes contemporary life:

Everything is getting topsy-turvy. The old landmarks are becoming merely monuments and hardly anything appears to be what it used to be. . . . People talk about a new morality, and some of them live as if all the old standards had gone by the boards. Is our world headed for the jungle again, where nobody counts and nobody cares? Who is in charge here, anyway?⁴⁷

Norms, once assumed to be inviolable, are questioned everywhere. Crisis piles upon crisis in the cities and among the nations. Drugs, violence, inflation, crime and war are the order of the day. "The fire is getting hotter, the pot is boiling."⁴⁸ And we are dropped into the center of the cauldron daily by the instant reporting of the mass media. In such a chaotic situation, men are understandably bewildered. It is a time when a sense of meaning easily slips from grasp. Panic is written on men's faces, whether in the dingy ghetto or "the most sumptuous suburban country club." Hysteria is abroad in the land, as Hoffmann sees it, and he feels obliged to tell his

⁴⁶Oswald Hoffmann, "A Tough Profession," p. 2.

⁴⁷Oswald Hoffmann, "Who Is in Charge Here?", p. 2.

⁴⁸Hoffmann, "Take Heart," p. 2.

listeners, "things probably are just as bad as you think they are."⁴⁹ Demonic forces rush in to fill the vacuum left at the center where a stable sense of meaning, or purpose, has vanished.

d. Transiency. Hoffmann also touches upon the existentialist motif of transiency. In the course of a sermon on Hebrews 11:8-10, "Dwelling in Tents," he notes how history has demonstrated for us the insubstantial nature of the state and of technological advances. These are touched by an evil which lies deep in the world and are idols that topple. On a more personal level, he observes how even the apparently enduring love of a husband for his wife can turn "to ashes in her mouth, because he has found some young chick who turned his head and made him forget all those years of faithful loyalty,"⁵⁰ when they struggled side by side. But this is the way of all things human and earthly. Nothing can be counted upon to endure forever: "Marble turns to mud, because that is what always happens to things that are seen. They perish."⁵¹

Death, however, is the ultimate sign of the transient quality of our existence. Hoffmann deals extensively with this theme in the sermon, "Why Die?", to which we have already referred. In part of the sermon, he speaks directly about some of the hard facts of death in our

⁴⁹Hoffmann, "Who Is in Charge Here?", p. 4.

⁵⁰Hoffmann, "Dwelling In Tents," pp. 4-5.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 4.

time, e.g., the casualty lists in Vietnam, the natural disasters and plane crashes which hit the headlines. He points, further, to the ways in which people today seem to conspire to disguise the fact of death. They strive anxiously to avoid confronting its reality in themselves. He discusses at length the theological relationship between sin and death. Then the preacher moves into a passage which holds unwaveringly before us the "mirror" of our mortality:

Death is bad news for everybody, for every man, woman or child alive. It is the pathetic note in all of life. It hangs over us all, as we say, like a pall. It is part of the atmosphere, like a layer of clouds shutting off the sun There isn't anything any one of us can do about it. There go, finally, all our hopes and all our dreams: We brought nothing into this world and it is certain we shall carry nothing out.⁵²

2. Edmund Steimle.

The preaching of the Law as "description of existence" runs through the Steimle sermons as a major theme. It is a rare sermon that does not include some articulation, in non-judgmental terms, of the human condition. Sometimes, as we shall note, the description is offered in montage form--a series of quick, concrete instances in which a more general aspect of existence is portrayed. At other times, a single image runs through a whole sermon and forms a counterpoint for the proclamation of the Gospel. In our analysis of this "mirror" dimension of the Steimle sermons, we will not employ, in most cases, the usual vocabulary of existentialist literature. Rather, we will

⁵²Hoffmann, "Why Die?", p. 4.

use Steimle's own descriptive words as the basis for our arrangement of material.

The categories for our analysis of Steimle's preaching of the Law as description of existence are: emptiness, darkness, eeriness and exile.

a. Emptiness. "Emptiness" in Steimle's vocabulary points to the hollowness of man's life in today's world. Beneath the glittering surface of advanced technology and affluence he sees a vacuum which modern man only partially succeeds in hiding. This theme is developed extensively in the sermon, "Arise and Walk," based on the story of the healing of the paralytic. This man, whose physical disability was a sign of a deeper, spiritual malady, offers a vantage point from which the preacher brings our age into perspective. In an advanced civilization, we have learned to say, "Arise and walk," in the face of many of man's age-old ills "with astonishing ease." Yet, even where we have turned back sickness, pain and hunger and have transformed the human environment, "the eyes of men are frighteningly empty and fearful."⁵³ There is a vacuum at the center of modern man's life which political demagogues or religious quacks sometimes rush in to fill, or which he tries to escape by immersion in work or flight into the shallow diversions of mass entertainment. We live in a time and place where we are "comfortable in the easiest of chairs and the softest of mattresses

⁵³Steimle, Are You Looking for God? p. 33.

but our minds are restless and fearful, if not bored, and our spirits are frighteningly empty.⁵⁴ Steimle finds this hollowness at the core of existence epitomized in a young woman, recently married, who has written asking seriously whether it is right to bring children into such a world as ours.

Steimle employs this same image in a sermon on the parable of the Empty House. He finds the parable to be a "surgeon's knife" which lays bare "the vast, aching emptiness of our times." He sees signs of this emptiness in the "silent generation" (the 1950's) on the college campuses, the "vacuum on the left" in politics, the loss of purpose in the labor movement and a certain failure of incentive about which he hears business leaders speaking. The shining surface of our national life should not delude us:

The house is swept clean and garnished - how entrancingly garnished! - with sleek airliners, television, atomic power, new and flashier cars every year, with bright modern buildings of glass and stainless steel, with plastics and nylons and everything, even pot roasts and peanuts, wrapped up in cellophane. The house sparkles and glitters but the footsteps within have an ominously hollow sound.⁵⁵

The footsteps are those of the "seven demons more wicked than the first"--"fear, hysteria, the political demagogue, confusion, futility" and more besides. Here the image of emptiness is developed more in terms of its public, national dimensions than, as in "Arise and Walk," its personal manifestations.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 35.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 80.

An aspect of emptiness to which Steimle occasionally points is what might be termed the "ordinariness" of life. He has a sure eye for the trivialities which often bog people down and in the midst of which they find purpose and zest draining out of their lives. In one sermon, he speaks of how the romantic dreams of a young couple at the threshold of marriage have a way of being shattered amid the actualities of "hair curlers and stubby beards, the maddening crunch of toast between the teeth of the beloved across the breakfast table, the short tempers and clash of wills and personalities"⁵⁶ This dreary monotony of the daily routine is given full scale treatment in a sermon based on Jesus' temptation in the wilderness and entitled, "The Peril of Ordinary Days." His point is that faith faces its acid test not in moments of crisis when a measure of heroism is called for but in the long, undramatic pull of commonplace days, in whose small duties the spirit is simply worn down. Then we are tempted to ask,

Can this long, flat, dull, and dusty road of ordinary days lead me closer to God? This unheroic life of dirty dishes and crying children, of streetcars and time clocks, of telephone calls and ringing doorbells, of feeding chickens and sweating for a week's pay--is this the life of a child of God?⁵⁷

Here, in a series of quick exposures, is a photograph of existence under what Wingren, as we noted earlier, calls the "compulsion" of the Law in its first use--the mundane demands of life in the orders of society which accumulate to form a heavy burden.

⁵⁶Steimle, Disturbed by Joy, p. 76.

⁵⁷Steimle, Are You Looking for God? pp. 44-45.

b. Darkness. "Darkness" is an image which Steimle uses on occasion to symbolize the negative conditions under which man unavoidably lives in this world. "Unrelieved darkness," for example, is the nature of the answer some have reached in their search to penetrate the mystery of life. Steimle is aware that in the course of all our lives there are moments when events conspire to produce a feeling of the absurdity of things, so that we will be tempted to conclude that "if there is a God . . . , which is doubtful, he must be a monster, laughing hideously at our puny efforts to control cancer and heart disease or the hydrogen bomb."⁵⁸ Sometimes darkness overtakes the spirit without apparent reference to any external circumstances. This is "the dark night of the soul" of which the mystics have spoken, and Steimle gives a remarkably honest and accurate description of these times of religious depression in a sermon, "The Feeling and the Reality," based on Psalm 42. It is evident that he knows something first hand about the "dark hours when there is no voice, no sign of God's presence and concern."⁵⁹

"Darkness" is the dominant image, counterbalanced by the Word of Promise, in an Advent sermon entitled, "Voices in the Dark." The text is Isaiah 40:1-8, and Steimle sees the prophetic, "Comfort, comfort my people . . . , " delivered to the Hebrews in the desolation of their exile as a sign of how God's Word of hope" is heard more distinctly

⁵⁸ Steimle, Disturbed by Joy, p. 38.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 153.

and clearly in the silent darkness."⁶⁰ The Christmas story itself, with its imagery of a dark stable and angel songs out of the midnight sky, further symbolizes this fact of our experience. Therefore, as preparation for the Christmas festival, Steimle urges his listeners, "Soak yourself in the darkness of life, if you've a stomach for it," and then proceeds to paint for them a montage of scenes which will suggest to them the shadowed underside of existence. Among them are:

. . . the unemployed man huddled on a park bench staring vacantly into nothingness; the hospital for incurables with the patients ticking off the endless minutes until the end; the city slums hopelessly caught in the web of racial, political and social structure that apparently offer no hope.⁶¹

"Darkness," of course, has much to do with suffering. It is the atmosphere of pain, and Steimle shows throughout the sermons a deep sensitivity to the manifold agonies to which human life is subject and which drive men to the outer edges of doubt and despair. He sees a paradigm of man's anguish in the wreath which Dag Hammarskjold's sister placed upon his grave; it bore the single word, "Why?" Steimle deals head-on with the reality of suffering and this bewildered question which it wrings from the heart in a sermon entitled, "Is God as Good as Jesus?," and acknowledges that in the face of "the terrifying mystery of evil in the world and in ourselves," it is entirely possible for a man to conclude that "there is no God at all and if there is, he's a monster."⁶²

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 25. ⁶¹Ibid., p. 27. ⁶²Ibid., p. 168.

c. Eeriness. "Eeriness" is meant to evoke the nightmarish quality that life can take on. It suggests the mask of the absurd that existence sometimes wears, the confusions and contradictions of which the world is full, the distortions of value and reality that frequently characterize our perception of life. We tend, for example, to be "hypnotized by the busy and important affairs of the world, with an insatiable appetite for size and bigness."⁶³ Boasts fly around about the biggest city or bomb or steel plant or congregation, under the illusion that bigness signifies "unusual worth or value." Steimle also sees a frenetic quality in modern life. We're an age in a hurry "that rushes through the week to reach the weekend and then rushes through the weekend to rush through another week to reach the weekend. . . ."⁶⁴ Anyone who has his eyes open to our world is likely to witness a crazy-quilt array of sights which show little rhyme or reason:

. . . . watch the children growing up and moving out only to have their children grow up and move out with few of them really sure why or for what; . . . watch the children playing in the streets with balls and dolls one minute only to exchange them before you know it for zip gun and contraceptives; . . . watch the puzzlement of the richest nation on earth wondering what to do with four to five million unemployed and embarrassed by its overflowing wheat bins while Kentucky miners put their children to bed hungry.⁶⁵

⁶³Steimle, Are You Looking for God? p. 96.

⁶⁴Steimle, Disturbed by Joy, p. 143.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 56.

The story of Jacob's midnight wrestling match at the crossing of the Jabbok becomes for Steimle a parable of the age: "It's a nightmare. A tale told by an idiot. It's a weird and eerie story, . . . as eerie as a struggle in the dark by the river Jabbok. . . ." ⁶⁶ As evidences of this nightmarish quality of life today, Steimle offers such facts as the "Ugly American" label which has been affixed to a nation which thinks it has acted generously in the world, the spectre of racial fears in South Africa and our own land, the "mess" of our plight in Vietnam. It's as though we had reached a modern Jabbok crossing in which we were assailed by "some unknown demon . . . in the dark." All of this is done without any concern on the preacher's part to point a finger of accusation, though there are other passages in which Steimle does seek to establish our responsibility for the plight of the world. Here the preacher's goal is rather to bring his hearers to recognize with him that "the times are out of joint."

d. Exile. One of the most familiar existentialist categories of analysis is "estrangement" or "alienation." We have already noted how Tillich employs it in his interpretation of sin. He sees three dimensions to man's estrangement: he is estranged from others, from himself, and from God, the ground of his being. ⁶⁷ In one of Steimle's sermons, the image "strangers and exiles" carries the weight of the

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 103.

⁶⁷ Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951-63), II, 44.

existentialist category. It is drawn from Hebrews 11:13. Steimle finds it to be a strikingly contemporary image which literally mirrors the experience of millions in our time--the Displaced Persons from the Baltic states after World War II, the Arabs in Palestinian refugee camps, the Cuban exiles in the United States. Figuratively, it mirrors something still more fundamental to the human condition--an "inconsolable secret" (C. S. Lewis), a sense of being on the outside looking in, a feeling of impermanence and foreignness about our situation in the world. Our problem, however, does not lie in the fact that we are "strangers and exiles." That is simply man's true status in a world which was never meant to be his lasting home. The difficulty lies rather in our frantic efforts to avoid facing this fact:

Some attempt to dull the pain with the obvious sedatives: TV, the corner bar, or the comforting sensation of rubbing our fur against the fur of other human animals. Adolescents, for whom the sudden awakening to the fact that they are 'strangers and exiles' is all but unbearable, characteristically pull themselves into all sorts of queer shapes to prove to themselves and their peers that this is the one thing they are not, that they're completely, utterly, even bitterly at home in their world and ours. And a lot of us never outgrow their adolescent reaction.⁶⁸

Our fundamental problem is that we try desperately and unsuccessfully to turn a world that was meant to be only an inn for transients into a permanent home; but our hearts "secretly rebel," for they will be satisfied with nothing less than reaching their true resting place in God.

⁶⁸Steimle, Disturbed by Joy, p. 172.

Death, of course, is the ultimate mark of our transiency. Without hope in life beyond, death becomes a "door banged shut" at the end of our way through this world. Steimle observes that for many thousands of people life has been little more than a series of "doors banging shut in their faces"⁶⁹--for example, the mentally retarded and the physically deformed. But for all of us death is the last door, "the final horizon," beyond which we cannot see. There is, however, in contemporary life "a conspiracy to put death in parentheses."⁷⁰ Cemeteries become memorial parks and are removed to the edge of the city; last rites are isolated in "funeral homes." The consequence of such efforts to erase from consciousness the sign of our transiency is "an underlying anxiety which infects our lives, a nameless dread"⁷¹ which only rarely emerges into recognition. We who are "strangers and exiles" in this world will be able to face our true situation with honest realism and authentic hope only when we hear the Easter Word that death is not the last door or the final horizon.

C. AN APPRAISAL OF HOFFMANN AND STEIMLE AS PREACHERS OF LAW

We will conclude this chapter with an appraisal of the ways in which the Law reaches expression in the preaching of Hoffmann and Steimle. Our guidelines will be the set of criteria established in the final section of Chapter One. We will list each criterion in

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 90. ⁷⁰Ibid., p. 94. ⁷¹Ibid.

turn and then measure against it what we have discovered in the sermons which have been analyzed in Sections A and B of the present chapter.

1. The Law will be preached in order to confront men with their accountability for their lives.

A statistical analysis of the two collections of sermons used in this study would reveal an almost equal range in the occurrence of passages which fall within the category, "judgment upon personal offense." Yet, Hoffmann emerges as the preacher in whom this motif in the preaching of Law is dominant, partly because it is counterbalanced by relatively less preaching of Law as "mirror of existence." We have seen that even when he turns to descriptions of man's broken existence, he often does not stop with description but moves on to accusation. Man is accountable for the fractured nature of his own and the world's life.

The accusatory mood of many passages in the Hoffmann sermons is further heightened by the blunt style we have noted. Charges are levelled against the listener with unadorned frankness (e.g., "He is not bamboozled by all your pretense"; "You are a sinner"). The preacher's intent seems to be to back the listener into a corner from which there is no escape and then to batter him into a confession of his guilt before God. Here we find direct continuity with Luther's description of the Law as a "large and powerful hammer" whose function it is to break through the thick defenses man builds out of his

self-righteousness.

It quickly becomes apparent, when one turns to the Steimle sermons, that this preacher does not wield the hammer in the same way. More accurately, he uses a different kind of hammer. Hoffmann's hammer often has the impact of a sledge that "breaks the rock" of our resistance with blunt force. Steimle, by comparison, often appears to be addressing our conscience with the finesse of a detective tapping a panelled wall for concealed hiding places. His material often expresses a more subtle analysis than Hoffmann's of the motions of sin in the human heart. One has the feeling that he is not so much being hit between the eyes as taken by the elbow and led aside for a quiet talk. This is not to say that Steimle's preaching of judgment is less effective than Hoffmann's. Indeed, his less sledge-like approach makes it easier for us to accept accountability for what we are. We are disarmed rather than crushed.

2. The preaching of Law today will be more concerned with the underlying sin which corrupts men's lives than with its surface manifestations.

Here, Steimle appears to be both in more direct touch with the tradition from Luther than is Hoffmann and a better guide for the preacher of Law today. He never leaves the contours of sin undefined, as Hoffmann is sometimes inclined to do ("You are a sinner"), but tries always to move beyond generality into concrete description of the reality a person is confessing when he acknowledges, "I am a

sinner." Not to do this is to fall into a kind of "homiletical docetism"--sin will seem to be without form or substance, and, therefore, unrelated to the actualities of the listener's life. The obverse danger is that the preacher will become so busy with the castigation of specific manifestations of sin that he will ignore the underlying condition of which they are symptoms. When this happens, the preacher succumbs to a sterile moralizing.

Steimle avoids both moralizing and docetism. He avoids the latter peril by "incarnating" sin in recognizable personal and corporate forms--the over-protective mother whose "love" is a camouflage of her desire to dominate, the racism that masquerades as "family pride," the smug sense of superiority of Western civilization now being challenged by the "storm over Africa and Asia." But he avoids moralizing by consistently moving behind external manifestations of sin to its primal root. Here, he stands with Luther in perceiving "the sin behind all sins" as unbelief. At the center of his being, man is simply unwilling to believe that God can accept him as he is, or touch his ordinary life with glory, or sweep him out into the "spaciousness" of His own vast purposes for the world.⁷²

Hoffmann does not as consistently avoid the Scylla and Charybdis of docetism and moralizing. We have noted his tendency at times to pin the general, undifferentiated label "sinner" on his

⁷²Cf. "Temptation then consists not so much in the titanic desire to be as God, but in weakness, timidity, weariness, not wanting to be what God requires of us." Jürgen Moltmann, Theology of Hope (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 22.

hearers, without identifying any concrete, recognizable manifestations of that condition. On the other hand, in sermons such as the two cited on the subject of family life, he paints vivid portraits of the kind of parents to whom he objects. Here, the problem is that he does not move beyond scorn for a particular pattern of parent-child relationship. Missing in the sermon is a compassionate effort to understand the social and psychological factors which cause families to gravitate in the direction of over-permissiveness, and, additionally, any word about the dangers of hyper-authoritarian family structures.

3. The preaching of Law today will take into account men's involvement in social evil as well as more directly personal expressions of sin.

While Hoffmann and Steimle do not ignore the vast, corporate structures of injustice and inhumanity in which man's sin is manifest, this dimension of evil is somewhat peripheral to the major thrust of their preaching. Most of the sermons are directed to problems and needs which arise in the smaller, more intimate world of directly interpersonal relations. Both preachers are sensitive to the broader socio-cultural context of these problems and needs, but they do not often address themselves directly and extensively to that context.

In both bodies of sermons, references to such issues as war and peace, race, poverty, and political and economic institutions are

most apt to come by way of illustrations in the course of sermons whose main point could not fairly be defined in broad social terms. Such passages occur far more frequently in Steimle's sermons than in Hoffmann's, contributing to a sense that he is by far the more sensitive to and concerned about the social implications of the Gospel. One notes that in the course of the sermons analyzed he touches on the following "social issues": war, international and domestic politics, race and civil rights, poverty and ecological problems. Hoffmann refers to: violence, racism, political responsibility and war, but the references are far less frequent than in Steimle and, except in the case of the sermon "Hope Not in Politicians," are made almost in passing.

It may be that the fact that the sermons studied were all used in radio broadcasts and, therefore, prepared and taped some period of time before the actual day of broadcasting, conditions the degree to which they address immediate public issues. Hoffmann's sermon, "The Sanctity of Human Life," which relates directly to the assassination of Robert Kennedy, is the one instance in which a current "headline event" provides the human context for the sermon. The impossibility of knowing what crisis will have occurred in the nation or in the world during the week preceding the Sunday on which a sermon will be heard is a special handicap for the radio preacher. Yet, during decades when the question of war and the problem of racial injustice were seldom less than acute, it is surprising that neither collection contains a sermon in which the Law is directed throughout against one

of these social ills.

4. The Law will be preached today in order to bring into consciousness the "dark underside" of man's existence.

It is clear that this mode of preaching Law is dominant in the Steimle sermons. It is not just that there is a statistical preponderance of passages in which the Law is preached as "mirror of existence" over those in which it is preached as "hammer of judgment." With Steimle, this mode of preaching Law is, in words of Ott cited earlier, not merely a "special aspect of proclamation, but its entire, all embracing horizon."⁷³ Steimle simply does not preach without exposing the "dark underside" of man's existence. It is part of his power as a preacher that he can awaken in the listener (or reader) a sense of self-recognition in this regard. Aspects of our life, which we are often unwilling or unable to articulate, find evocative expression in sermon after sermon.

At one level, Steimle's effectiveness lies in his skill with language. One of his most frequent devices is a series of images, almost photographic in quality, forming a montage in which we see some aspect of our human condition reflected. He is also capable of so richly elaborating a single image (such as "eeriness," or "darkness") that the listener experiences the quality of life of which the preacher speaks. In short, Steimle is more the poet than Hoffmann,

⁷³Cf. p. 41 above.

and, whereas Hoffmann's more blunt style may have some value when the Law is preached as judgment, Steimle's more evocative language has greater effect when the Law is preached as a description of our existence. We are drawn, not driven, to self-recognition as we see our own life mirrored in the preacher's words.

At another level, Steimle's power as a preacher of Law in the "mirror" mode stems from a still more subtle quality which his sermons communicate. He conveys a sense of speaking from within the human condition he describes rather than from without. One hears the voice of a participant in the alienations and agonies of contemporary life, not the comments of an observer. The queries, cries, and complaints which constantly sound in the sermons are the preacher's as well as the listeners'. One senses that his descriptions of the "dark underside" of life are not merely a staged backdrop for the subsequent proclamation of the Gospel; they are life as the preacher knows it from his own struggle with the contradictions of existence.

Hoffmann, by contrast, sometimes communicates a sense of looking at the human predicament from a safe vantage point outside or above it. He describes life as it is for the hearer but not necessarily for the preacher. The frequent use, noted above, of the second person pronoun in passages of judgment and the tendency to remind us of our accountability for realities such as brokenness, despair and death, contribute to this weakening of the sense that the preacher "sits where we sit."

5. The preacher of Law will find in the Gospel itself a powerful proclamation of Law.

There is a sense, of course, in which the proclamation of the Gospel implies the operation of the Law. If man were not "accused," or, if he were not broken and alienated, there would be no possible reason for holding out to him a promise of grace and healing. Therefore, to preach God's "Yes" presupposes that a "No" has been spoken over man's existence.

This fifth criterion, however, refers to a more deliberate intent on the part of the preacher to draw from the message of the Cross and the Resurrection inferences as to man's sin and need. Luther, as we noted in the previous chapter, saw Christ's Passion to be an especially moving witness to man of his own desperate resistance to God.

Here, Hoffmann, usually in highly conventional language, maintains close continuity with Luther. There are frequent passages in his sermons where the link between man's sin and Christ's Cross is explicitly drawn. Sin, with all its "enmity and hostility," is what drove Christ to the Cross. Our redemption came at a "price," and Hoffmann takes occasion to remind us that the cost to God was Christ's death.

Steimle's preaching of Law by way of the Gospel takes a different direction. He doesn't bid us contemplate Christ's sufferings and death as a sign of the consequence of man's evil. But again and

again he sets in juxtaposition the expansive and extravagant love of God, manifest in the whole event of Christ, with the cramped and cautious nature of our own living. God's vast purposes are frustrated by our miniscule expectations; the "roominess" of his love gets scaled down to the narrow boundaries of our prejudices. His strange way of fulfillment through suffering meets unabated resistance from our determination to avoid sacrifice. The joyous announcement of Easter "disturbs" us, because the power of which it speaks threatens to undo the easy bargains we strike with life.

Here is a far wider range of themes than appears in Hoffmann, with his tendency to remain within the traditional "sin/Cross" axis. Likewise, Steimle's way of seeing man's sins as the obverse of various facets of God's grace always provides him with a "theocentric," or "christocentric" base for preaching Law. From one perspective, man's sin is his attempt to reduce the limitless dimensions of God's grace to manageable size. He refuses to "let God be God" and to let his own life be shaped into the divine image.

6. The preaching of Law will not be an end in itself but will serve the purpose of the Gospel.

For Steimle, it is consistently true that the preaching of Law moves toward its fulfillment in the announcement of the Gospel. This does not mean that in every sermon the design is first Law and then Gospel. It does mean that the Law is never preached, either as judgment or description, for its own sake. In most of the sermons, there

are passages to which a Law/Gospel content analysis can unequivocally attach the label, "Gospel." They clearly announce God's "Yes" to man. About this more will be said in the next chapter. The important thing to note here is that these passages are always in organic relationship with the material around them. They never appear to be "tacked on" in order to fulfil an abstract requirement that the Word as Gospel must be preached. But even when, in a particular sermon, there is no passage which can be clearly labelled, "Gospel," there is a sense of being affirmed and not rejected. This comes by way of our intuition that the preacher himself understands the negativities of our existence. It comes also by way of the manner in which he lays God's demands upon us: they are signs of the high value God places upon our lives. God asks much because, under His grace, we are capable of much.

Hoffmann, too, usually includes in a sermon passages which content analysis would designate "Gospel." Yet, two factors in his preaching make it necessary to qualify his fulfillment of this final criterion for the preaching of Law. One factor is both the bluntness and extensiveness of his language of judgment in some of the sermons.⁷⁴ The mood created is so dominantly one of attack that the brief passages of "Gospel" cannot remove the sense of being judged and rejected. The second factor is the arbitrariness with which some

⁷⁴Cf. especially, "The Price of Permissiveness," "Phony Families," and "Stuck on Yourself."

passages of "Gospel" seem to be inserted into the context of the sermon. In part, this is, as we shall see in the next chapter, a matter of the conventional language Hoffmann often uses to articulate grace. The Gospel has the appearance of a ready-made, unchanging answer to the various ills of mankind, and, therefore, seems simplistic in its statement.

CHAPTER III

THE PREACHING OF GOSPEL

In this chapter, we will follow a line of development parallel to that in Chapter One. Our first task will be to examine Luther's understanding of the second form in which the Word of God reaches man--the Word as Gospel. From this base we will proceed to a discussion of interpretations of Gospel in contemporary theology which have special relevance for the preaching task today. We will see that, in most direct continuity with Luther, there is an understanding of Gospel as the message of forgiveness which coordinates with an understanding of Law as judgment. We will discover also a broader understanding of Gospel which coordinates with an understanding of Law as description of existence. Out of this discussion of both Reformation and contemporary interpretations, we will draw a set of criteria for preaching Gospel today.

A. THE REFORMATION HERITAGE

Luther, as we saw in Chapter I, speaks of the Law as God's "strange work." To execute judgment is, in a certain sense, out of character for Him. Just as an earthly father is not relating to his children in a way closest to his real desires when he rebukes and punishes them, so God is not doing what lies deepest in His heart when He threatens and condemns. God speaks His Word as Law as a hard necessity which will make it possible for Him to speak His Word as

Gospel. Only when He addresses men through the Gospel is He doing His "proper work." For this reason, preachers must not stop short with declaring the Law, for this would amount to "wounding and not binding up, smiting and not healing, killing and not making alive, leading down into hell and not bringing back again, humbling and not exalting."¹ Preaching must always move beyond Law to the proclamation of Gospel. It was thus that Luther viewed his own role as a preacher in the church: "We would rather not preach again for the rest of our life than to let Moses return and to let Christ be torn out of our hearts."²

It is possible to describe the Gospel in terms of a series of antitheses to the characteristic features of the Law: Christ as against Moses, promise as against demand, comfort as against threat, gift as against duty, grace as against judgment, justification as against condemnation, forgiveness as against punishment, freedom as against bondage, joy as against terror, life as against death. The "Gospel" sides of these antitheses all have as their subject God in His "proper work" and as their object man, the sinner. The Gospel is God's revelation of Himself as merciful Father rather than angry Judge, offering Himself freely to His children, not because they deserve His love but because they need it. The Gospel is God declaring sinners to be sons, lifting the desperate out of their hopelessness, releasing

¹Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian" (1520), in his Selections From His Writings (Garden City: Doubleday, 1961), p. 72.

²Martin Luther, "How Christians Should Regard Moses" (1525), in his Works (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959-), XXXV, 164.

men from the harsh bondage of the Law into "the glorious liberty of the children of God," raising those who were "dead in trespasses and sins" into newness of life. Its true note sounds in a verse from St. Matthew's Gospel which Luther never tires of quoting: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (11:28).

Luther's focus, in coordination with his dominant understanding of Law as judgment, is upon the Gospel as the message of justification, or forgiveness. He knows, however, about distresses of the human heart other than guilt to which the Gospel speaks its word of comfort and hope. The desolations of his own periods of Anfechtung were compounded of elements other than a troubled conscience. Likewise, Christians are subject to the same bodily afflictions as other men. In addition, they must bear suffering and persecution from those who oppose God's Word. Above all, there is the tyrant of death, which along with sin and the Law, turns men's hearts to despair. Under all these burdens, men can find in the Gospel strength to persevere:

. . . You 'who labor and are heavy laden,' that is with the law, with sin, with anxiety and affliction and with whatever else may burden the conscience. That's why he does not give it any special name. He does not say with this or that difficulty, but simply says, 'all who are heavy laden.' . . . he not only refreshes us in the anxiety and assaults of sin, but he will be with us in all other troubles.³

³Martin Luther, "Sermon on St. Matthias' Day" (1525), in Ibid., II, 129, 130.

At the center of the Gospel stands Jesus Christ.⁴ Men cannot "clamber into heaven" and penetrate the mystery of God's being. The knowledge that He is a forgiving Father is available to us only at that point in time where God has opened His heart in a new and marvelous way: "There is no other God than this Man Jesus Christ."⁵ If men want to find a gracious God, they must close out all else but Christ, "for apart from Him there is no God in the sense that I am able to find Him and come to Him, although He is present everywhere in other respects."⁶ The lowly form of the Incarnation was designed for the comfort of men, so that in their spiritual distress they would not need to take as their starting point vain speculations about God. Rather,

. . . you must run directly to the manger and the mother's womb, embrace this infant and Virgin's child in your arms, and look at Him--born, being nursed, growing up, going about in human society, teaching, dying, rising again, ascending above all the heavens, and having authority over all things. In this way you can shake off all terrors and errors, as the sun dispels the clouds.⁷

⁴Cf. "For at its briefest the Gospel is a discourse about Christ, that he is the son of God and became man for us, that he died and was raised, that he has been established as Lord over all things." "A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels" (1522), in *Ibid.*, XXXV, 118.

⁵Martin Luther, "Lectures on Galatians" (1535), in *Ibid.*, XXVI, 29. Cf. "For in Christ the Father pours himself out in his grace." Martin Luther, "Sermon on the Raising of Lazarus" (1518), in *Ibid.*, LI, 46.

⁶Ewald M. Plass (ed.), *What Luther Says* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), II, 552-553. Quoted from sermon on John 14:10 (1537).

⁷Luther, "Lectures on Galatians" (1535), in his *Works*, XXVI, 30.

In fact, to speak of the form of the incarnation as "lowly" scarcely expresses the measureless grace which Jesus embodied in his life, death and resurrection. Luther uses exceedingly bold language in his effort to convey something of the incredible nature of what took place in Christ. In order to be for us a Mediator and Redeemer, Christ submitted himself to a radical exchange of roles whereby he became what we are. By taking the sins of the world to the Cross, he became "the greatest thief, murderer, adulterer, robber, desecrator, blasphemer, etc., there has ever been anywhere in the world."⁸ In order to free me from the ravages of the Law, sin and death, he, to whom none of these was native, became "my Law, my sin and my death." Thus, through a kind of homeopathic medicine, he fought like with like, making himself the very disease through which a remedy could be effected. "For Christ is my devil against the devil, that I might be a son of God."⁹

Another way of putting this is to say that the Gospel is a Law against the Law. Luther sees this to be the meaning of Paul's statement, "I through the Law died to the Law." Christ, with his Gospel of unmerited forgiveness, sets us free from the tyranny of the Law, with its demand for works. Thus, the Christian is placed under what can

⁸Ibid., XXVI, 277.

⁹Ibid., XXVI, 164. Cf. "Accordingly the believing soul can boast of and glory in whatever Christ has as though it were his own, and whatever the soul has Christ claims as his own. . . . By the wedding ring of faith he shares in the sins, death, and pains of hell which are his bride's." Luther, "The Freedom of the Christian (1520), pp. 60, 61.

paradoxically be called "the law of liberty," and he can say, ". . . the Law that once bound me and held me captive is now bound and held captive by grace or liberty, which is now my Law."¹⁰

In this sense, Christ marks the end of the Law. As ways to salvation, Law and Gospel are in absolute contradiction, even though, as we have seen, the Law may become in God's hands a sharp instrument to goad men to set foot on the way of the Gospel. Nevertheless, there can be no compromise between them with regard to one's fundamental relationship with God.¹¹ Where the Law prevails, with its demand for absolute righteousness, man is locked in a dungeon from which there is no human means of escape. The Gospel, with its promise of unconditional grace, is the key that unlocks the door, so that man may come out again and stand in the sunlight of God's love. Thus, the Law is an enemy over which the Gospel triumphs. In Luther's graphic words, "Moses, the old settler, has to yield and emigrate somewhere else when Christ, the new guest, comes into the house to live there alone. And where He is, there the Law, sin, wrath and death have no place."¹² Or,

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 161.

¹¹ "For God speaks through the law saying, 'Do this, avoid that, this is what I expect of you.' The gospel, however, does not preach what we are to do or to avoid. It sets up no requirements but reverses the approach of the law, does the very opposite, and says, 'this is what God has done for you; he has let his Son be made flesh for you, has let him be put to death for your sake.'" Luther, "How Christians Should Regard Moses" (1525), in his Works, XXXV, 162.

¹² Luther, "Lectures on Galatians" (1535), in Ibid., XXVI, 152. Cf. "It is as if Christ were saying: Flesh and timid natures look upon me as if I were cruel, stern, and severe, but I am not so. I am gentle and lowly in heart. I do not terrify people, as Moses did. I

again, "When Christ is present, the Law must not rule in any way but must retreat from the conscience and yield the bed to Christ alone, since it is too narrow for both."¹³

But all the foregoing is of no avail so long as men hear it as if at a distance. Men are to hear the Gospel not as a proclamation sent out to the world "in general" but as God's address to each one personally.

Luther stresses this point in his exposition of Galatians 2:20b: "And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." "Who is this 'me'?", Luther asks; and he replies, "It is I"¹⁴ It is one thing to believe that Christ gave himself in love for Peter, Paul and the saints. It is quite another matter--but the crucial matter--to believe that he gave himself for me, "an accursed and damned sinner." When torments of conscience assail a man, he finds it well-nigh impossible to apply this Gospel of grace to himself. At such moments, the devil disguises himself as Christ, and "the Justifier and the Savior" seems to be only "a lawgiver and a judge." Therefore, a Christian must learn to "read these words 'me' and 'for me' with great emphasis, and accustom [himself] to accepting this 'me' with a

do not preach: do this, do that. I preach the forgiveness of sins. I preach only that you should receive, not that you should give anything." Luther, "Sermon on St. Mathias' Day" (1525), in Ibid., LI, 130-31.

¹³Luther, "Lectures on Galatians" (1535), in Ibid., XXVI, 176.

¹⁴Ibid.

sure faith and applying it to [himself]."¹⁵ Luther gives moving expression to this same theme in a Christmas sermon based on the Lucan nativity story. He singles out for special exposition the announcement of the angels to the shepherds, "To you is born this day a Savior":

So great should that light which declares that he is my Savior become in my eyes that I can say: Mary, you did not bear this child for yourself alone. The child is not yours; you did not bring him forth for yourself, but for me, even though you are his mother, even though you held him in your arms and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and picked him up and laid him down. . . . This child who is born of the virgin is not only his mother's son. I have more than the mother's estate; he is more mine than Mary's, for he was born for me, for the angel said, 'To you' is born the Savior. Then ought you to say, Amen, I thank Thee, dear Lord.¹⁶

It is the task of the preacher to assist Christians in making this application of the Gospel to themselves;¹⁷ hence, the importance of rightly dividing between Law and Gospel. Moses and Christ are not to be confused. Where Christ is preached as "a taskmaster or a law-giver," the Gospel is denied and men are delivered again into bondage. But the Gospel is rightly proclaimed and terrified hearts find joy and peace where Christ is depicted as,

¹⁵Ibid., XXVI, 179.

¹⁶Martin Luther, "Sermon on the Afternoon of Christmas Day" (1530), in Ibid., LI, 214, 215.

¹⁷"Rather ought Christ to be preached to the end that faith in him may be established that he may not only be Christ, but be Christ for you and me, and that what is said and denoted in his name may be effectual in us. Such faith is produced and preserved in us by preaching why Christ came, what he brought and bestowed, what benefit it is to us to accept him." Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian" (1520), p. 66.

. . . the Dispenser of grace, the Savior, and the Pitier . . .
 nothing but sheer, infinite mercy, which gives and is given.
 . . . the highest art among Christians is to be able to define
 Christ this way; it is also the most difficult of arts.¹⁸

B. THE CONTEMPORARY DISCUSSION

1. The Necessity of Preaching Gospel.

There is a concensus among those who devote attention to the theological content of the sermon that Christian preaching fulfills its task only when it moves beyond the Law to the proclamation of the Gospel. Among Lutheran homileticians, for example, Davis observes that "throughout its history, Christian preaching has had this proclamation of the Gospel as its dominant note."¹⁹ Caemmerer, likewise, contends that preaching "really begins" only when the sermon moves from the declaration of God's judgment to the announcement of "God's rescue."²⁰ They stand in the direct succession from Luther with his contention that the Word of God must not be limited to its "strange work" as man's accuser; it must be set at liberty to do its "proper work" as man's comforter. This is equally true if the Law is preached more in the mode of "description" than of "judgment." The sermon which serves only as a "mirror" or as a "hammer" is

¹⁸Luther, "Lectures on Galatians" (1535), in his Works, XXVI, 178.

¹⁹Henry Grady Davis, Design for Preaching (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), p. 115.

²⁰Richard R. Caemmerer, Preaching for the Church (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), p. 27.

abortive. It fails to find its essential fruition in a Word which announces to man a way beyond his guilt and alienation.

Two recent efforts to provide a theological schematization for the sermon express this same conviction. The first is by Heinrich Ott, whose interpretation of Law was noted in Chapter One. His analysis of the essential theological content of preaching is based upon the Heidelberg Catechism which, in its three main parts touches upon: (1) Man's "sin and wretchedness"; (2) the "redemption" wrought on his behalf by God through Christ; and, (3) the obligations of "gratitude" which God's redeeming act lays upon man.²¹ These three elements, Ott maintains, correspond to the "structural phases" of the life of faith. In the first phase, man is brought to the realization that his situation before God is one of "lostness." Then, through the Word of God's redemptive act in Christ, he "experiences an emancipating encounter with God" in the midst of his lost situation. Finally, out of this experience, there comes a radical re-orientation of his life toward new ends. Each of these "structural phases" of the life of faith is to have a corresponding element in the sermon. On the one side, the sermon must speak realistically and convincingly about man's predicament in history; on the other side, it must point up the kind of life man is obligated to live after his encounter with God's grace. But in the center,

²¹Heinrich Ott, Theology and Preaching (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), p. 48.

forming the theological heart of the sermon, there is to be the message which falls under the category of Gospel. Preaching,

. . . speaks to [man] of what God has done, in such a way as to meet the need of his sin and misery; it shows him how God confronts him precisely in the actual situation of his life.²²

This analysis, based upon a confessional document from the Reformed tradition, accords with what we have seen to be Luther's own understanding of the dynamic functions of the Word of God. As Law, the Word drives us to despair and causes us to "sigh for the help of the Mediator and Savior," who is introduced to us in the Word as Gospel as "the dispenser of grace . . . and the Pitier."

The second effort at a theological schematization of the sermon is that of the late Kyle Haselden. His analysis is based on a careful study of past and present preaching in the church. He claims that his examination of sermons from the whole range of the history of Christian preaching reveals three indispensable elements in what he characterizes as "the good sermon, . . . the biblical sermon." These elements are: (1) a description of and warning about "Man's Peril"; (2) an announcement of "God's Promise" standing over against the human peril; and, (3) the proclamation of "God's Act" in Christ, which gives effect to the Promise.²³ The first of these elements agrees with what appears in the Lutheran tradition as the function of

²²Ibid., p. 53.

²³Kyle Haselden, The Urgency of Preaching (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 42.

Law. The last two, taken together, are a statement of the Gospel, which Haselden further defines as "God's universal and sufficient gift of his will, his love and his power through his Son to needful man in all his conditions."²⁴ Haselden proposes two questions to be asked in determining the theological integrity of a sermon:

Does the sermon warn man of the danger in which sin and mortality submerge his whole being? Does the sermon hold out to such a man the promise of God's redeeming and resurrecting love?²⁵

The implication here is that a sermon which stops short with warning (just as one which fails to include it) is a torso. There must be something beyond threat, accusation, admonition, demand if a sermon is to qualify as "Christian." There must be dimensions of the sermon which speak with equal power of promise, gift, forgiveness, hope. In short, wherever the Word as Law is spoken, there the Word as Gospel must also be heard. "The good sermon always presents the Promise over against the Peril."²⁶

We must now turn to a consideration of how this Word of Promise is to be proclaimed. In Chapter One, we contended that it is possible to view the Law from two perspectives: (1) the Law as judgment, under the symbol of "hammer"; and, (2) the Law as description of existence, under the symbol of "mirror." We noted further how these two aspects of the Law, though distinguishable for purposes of analysis, are, in fact, interrelated both theologically and homiletically.

²⁴Ibid., p. 56.

²⁵Ibid., p. 55.

²⁶Ibid.

We now propose that it is possible to view the Gospel from a dual perspective which stands in reciprocal relation to the twofold interpretation of the Law. Over against the Law as judgment, we can speak of the Gospel as the word of forgiveness, or, in the terminology of the Reformation, as the message of justification by faith. It is not as easy, as we shall see, to find a single word or phrase to characterize the Gospel as it answers to the Law viewed as description of existence.

2. The Gospel as Forgiveness.

The Gospel proclaimed as forgiveness, or justification, clearly stands in most direct continuity with the Reformation tradition. For Luther, the Law functioned chiefly as the accuser of the conscience. His question, "How can I find a gracious God?," articulated the anguish of his whole age.²⁷ The message that in Christ sin is forgiven and condemnation is removed correlates exactly with this expression of the human plight. To man under judgment there comes the announcement that God, through His gracious act in Christ, has taken the crushing weight of guilt upon Himself. There is no longer any need--indeed it is a sign of unbelief--for man to struggle at the impossible task of justifying himself. Justification is a gift to those who trust God's promise that He claims them as His own in the face of

²⁷"Luther, and in fact, the whole period, experienced the anxiety of guilt and condemnation as the main form of their anxiety." Paul Tillich, The Courage to Be (London: Nisbet, 1952), p. 155.

their guilt.

There is much in contemporary interpretation of Luther and in contemporary Lutheran preaching which draws directly upon this portion of the Lutheran inheritance. Gustav Aulen, for example, in a volume which, though ecumenical in spirit, is admittedly under heavy debt to the Reformation tradition, devotes a major section to the discussion of forgiveness as the key to the restoration of the relationship with God which man has broken by sin.²⁸ He prefers the word "forgiveness" to the phrase "justification by faith," because the latter does not "possess the naturalness and intimacy of the word forgiveness."²⁹ Though both point to the same reality, the language of "justification" has its roots in the sphere of legal institutions; the word "forgiveness," on the other hand, springs out of the dynamics operative in the closest human relationships. Its stress is not so much upon a punishment which has been absolved as upon an estranged relationship which has been healed. Because of God's loving, forgiving action, God and man are brought together in vital communion.

This understanding of the Gospel as dealing primarily with guilt is apparent also in Tillich's well-known translation of "justification by faith" into the formulation, "to accept oneself as accepted in spite of being unacceptable."³⁰ It is true that Tillich acknowledges

²⁸Gustav Aulen, The Faith of the Christian Church (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1948), pp. 259-328.

²⁹Ibid., p. 291.

³⁰Tillich, The Courage to Be, p. 155.

the possibility of reading that formula in strictly human terms; the self-transcending experience of being accepted may occur, for example, in the therapeutic relationship between patient and analyst. But ultimately--and Tillich sees this as the heart of the Christian message--the experience of being accepted points to that accepting Reality which is the ground of existence. The Gospel is the promise that God accepts us, even though we are unacceptable, and faith is the accepting of the fact that this is so. It is to be noted also that Tillich's translation of justification into psychological categories preserves the "in-spite-of" character of the doctrine which, in another place, he declares to be "decisive for the whole Christian message as the salvation from despair about one's guilt."³¹ When a man knows that he need not first re-order his life to make it acceptable to God before he can experience acceptance, he is able at once to look away from the brokenness of his own condition to the God who takes the initiative in restoring fellowship with him even as he is.

Ebeling, whose interpretation of the Law we have had occasion to note, speaks of the gift of the Gospel in terms of "being free from care," but it is interesting that he too relates this freedom directly to the problem of guilt. It is not merely care in general from which the Gospel sets man free. He is liberated from an overweening concern about his own self--a self which, at its deepest

³¹Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951-63), II, 178.

levels, is bound by the "enslaving power of guilt and death."³² Man is anxious about himself because his conscience is burdened and because he knows he is on the way to death.

The question of guilt presses upon man in terms of the problem of time. In the experience of guilt, a man is dealing with his life as past:

What has happened, has happened. What is broken is broken. What has been omitted has been omitted. But the pressure of what is past is not past, but all too present.³³

This "then" which impinges upon man's "now" is irrevocable. Man is powerless to alter it. It weighs upon him in the form of guilt. Only the "miracle of divine grace,"³⁴ in which the burden is transferred from man's hands to God's, can release man from paralyzing care about himself. Then man is able to take his stand "on what is ultimately valid and reliable"³⁵--the Promise of Him who never fails to keep His Word. This experience in which man is set free from himself, or in which a future opens out from a past in which he had been locked, is nothing else but that to which the traditional language of theology points: it is "forgiveness, rebirth, justification."³⁶

³²Gerhard Ebeling, Theology and Proclamation (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 87.

³³Gerhard Ebeling, The Nature of Faith (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), p. 135.

³⁴Ibid., p. 136.

³⁵Ibid., p. 131.

³⁶Ibid., p. 136.

Thus far we have been speaking of forgiveness and justification with little direct reference to Jesus. This has been so, not because His centrality for the Gospel as forgiveness has been overlooked, but because it has been presupposed. Now what has been implicit must be stated explicitly: The preaching of the Gospel as forgiveness has at its center the person and work Jesus Christ.

Those contemporary interpreters of the Gospel to whom we have referred insist, each in his own way, upon the centrality of Christ in the proclamation of the Gospel. Ott declares that "He Himself, His Person is the essential ground of the deliverance from self which the kerygma proclaims,"³⁷ and designates the ancient confession, Kyrios Christos, "Christ is Lord," as the quintessence of the truth which sustains the church and which it is to declare. Similarly, Ebeling, while acknowledging the rich variety of themes that have a legitimate place in Christian preaching, insists that the "kerygma is eo ipso kerygma of Christ."³⁸ Freedom from care about the self, which we have seen to be his way of describing the gift of the Gospel, has its source in Jesus, who faced all the elements of existence with "certainty," and is able to open the way for others into "the life of certainty."³⁹ Jesus' "certainty," is seen, above all, in His death, by which He gave Himself to others in such a way that it was not "the

³⁷Ott, op. cit., p. 45.

³⁸Ebeling, Theology and Proclamation, p. 32.

³⁹Ibid., p. 90.

end but the fulfilment of his life for others."⁴⁰

Ebeling's reference to the Cross marks a further refinement in the definition of the centrality of the person and work of Jesus to the Gospel of forgiveness. His death, variously interpreted, is the decisive moment in the activity of grace through which God reconciles "the world unto Himself, not counting their trespasses against them." (II Corinthians 5:19). Thus, Aulen, to whose discussion of forgiveness we have referred, precedes that portion of his presentation of Christian doctrine with a full discussion of the significance of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.⁴¹ The two sections are combined under the major heading, "The Act of God In Christ." In Christ, we see the climax of a drama of which "the central point . . . is the act of reconciliation and victory of the self-sacrificing, divine love."⁴² Under no circumstances is the initiative and agency of God in this act to be compromised by interpreting the passion and death of Christ as a "compensation given to the divine righteousness."⁴³ Such a view, by suggesting that God has already been recompensed for the sin of man, robs the divine love of its "uncaused" character, thus reducing it to something other than sheer grace.⁴⁴ Tillich makes a similar point when he includes in his "principles of a doctrine of the atonement" the declaration that "the atoning processes

⁴⁰Ibid. ⁴¹Aulen, op. cit., pp. 207-258.

⁴²Ibid., p. 208. ⁴³Ibid., 297. ⁴⁴Ibid.

are created by God and God alone" and that "in the Cross of Christ the divine participation in existential estrangement becomes manifest."⁴⁵

It is not the case that at the Cross something occurred which made a God previously unwilling or unable to forgive now willing and able to do so; it is rather that in the death of Christ God is making a free yet infinitely costly offering of Himself to man.

3. The Gospel as Antiphon to Existence.

When one preaches Law as judgment upon sin, it is obvious that the Gospel proclaimed as forgiveness, or justification is its appropriate correlate. In each case, the focus is upon the conscience--first, to stir it out of complacency into guilt and, then, to lead it to a place of security in grace. It is not as easy to find a single word or phrase to characterize the Gospel as it answers to the Law seen as "description of existence." The difficulty grows out of the fact that any analysis of the structures of man's existence beyond those in which guilt is the primary factor must include many terms. We have already employed such varied designations as alienation, anxiety, doubt, despair, meaninglessness, emptiness, darkness and transiency. A whole spectrum of positive words would be necessary to answer adequately even to these just listed, e.g., reconciliation, confidence, faith, hope, meaning, fullness, light, enduringness.

⁴⁵Tillich, Systematic Theology, II, 173-175. Cf. also, "Not substitution, but free participation, is the character of the divine suffering." Ibid., II, 176.

Others besides would be needed in a vocabulary which set out to describe adequately the full dimensions of the Gospel.

In this section, we will not attempt to find a single word or phrase to do service for the whole. We will rather speak generally of the Gospel as "antiphon to existence." The word "antiphon" has a long liturgical tradition in the life of the church, but we are interested more in its generic meaning, rooted in the two Greek words anti (in return) and phonos (sounding). An antiphon is a voice lifted in response to another voice. It is not an echo, but speaks with a content independent of yet related to the voice it answers. In terms of our present discussion, to speak of the Gospel as "antiphon to existence" suggests that the actual form of its address will be qualified but not determined by the specific aspect of the human condition which the Law as "mirror" has reflected.⁴⁶

In an effort to see how this antiphonal movement actually occurs, we will examine ways in which the Gospel has been formulated by certain contemporary theologians in response to selected aspects of existence. Before turning to this examination, however, it is important to stress again three matters already touched upon.

⁴⁶The affinity with Tillich's approach to the theological task is obvious here; cf. his description of his "method of correlation" Ibid., I, 8. "... it is further necessary to seek a theological method in which message and situation are related in such a way that neither of them is obliterated. . . . The following system is an attempt to use the 'method of correlation' as a way of uniting method and situation. It tries to correlate the questions implied in the situation with the answers implied in the message. It correlates questions and answers, situation and message, human existence and divine manifestation."

First, it must be kept in mind that just as the Law as "judgment" and the Law as "description of existence" are interrelated, so are the Gospel as "forgiveness" and the Gospel as "antiphon to existence."⁴⁷ Judgment and forgiveness are as antiphonal in their nature as are, for example, despair and hope--a correlation to which we shall shortly turn. Furthermore, guilt may be a major ingredient in the structure of despair, so that forgiveness will be an element in the articulation of the Gospel as hope. The purpose of the two-fold schema we have followed is not radically to separate realities which in actuality exist together; it is rather, for the sake of analysis, to distinguish between a mode of preaching Law and Gospel which has judgment and forgiveness as its dominant stress and a mode in which the dominant stress is upon factors in the human condition other than guilt and elements in the Gospel other than forgiveness. Outside such analysis, however, in actual sermons and certainly in life itself, the realities of judgment and forgiveness interlace with the others we have enumerated and are themselves "antiphonal" in character.

Second, it should be remembered that though extra judgment and forgiveness categories of Law and Gospel are not central in the tradition from Luther, neither are they absent from that tradition.⁴⁸ Luther knows about anxiety, despair and the fear of death, as well as about guilt. This is apparent in his famous Anfechtungen--bouts of

⁴⁷Cf. pp. 44, 45 above.

⁴⁸Cf. p. 97 above.

spiritual anguish compounded of "all the doubt, turmoil, pang, tremor, panic, despair, desolation and desperation which invade the spirit of man."⁴⁹ It is arguable that the experience of guilt lies at the vortex of these swirling elements, yet it is also true that Luther can speak of the human condition in terms other than guilt.⁵⁰ Correspondingly, he can, as we have seen, declare the power of the Gospel to assuage man's heart not only in the matter of sin but "in all other troubles."⁵¹ What we are doing in this section of Chapter III, therefore, is to lift into a major position a mode of proclaiming Gospel which for Luther held a relatively minor position.

Third, the imprecise, overlapping character of the correlates we will use in our illustrations of the Gospel as "antiphon of existence" must be kept in mind. The pairings chosen for attention are: (1) alienation and unification; (2) anxiety and certitude; and (3) despair and hope. There is only relative precision in these designations. "Healing," for example, could be substituted for "unification," or "doubt" for "anxiety." Furthermore, these "sets," and others which could be added, do not exist in separation from each other. A sense of alienation, for example, is an ingredient in the mood of

⁴⁹Roland Bainton, Here I Stand (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950), p. 42.

⁵⁰Cf. Tillich, The Courage to Be, p. 161: "Luther had experiences which he describes as attacks of despair (Aufechtung), as the frightful threat of a complete meaninglessness. . . . Luther in these moments, and in the descriptions he gives of them, anticipates the descriptions of them by modern Existentialism."

⁵¹Cf. p. 97 above.

despair, even as an experience of certitude contributes to unification or healing. We are dealing with a complex nexus of realities, separable only for purposes of analysis.

With the above qualifications in mind, we will now turn to the three correlates just listed and note briefly how the Gospel as "antiphon of existence" has been given expression by certain contemporary theologians.

a. Alienation and Unification. "Alienation" points to the broken condition of man and his world. Man experiences himself as "un-whole," and he is often more aware of his separation from than of his relationship with reality outside himself. The communities in which he participates are fragmented and often polarized. "Brokenness" and "estrangement" are other terms which can do service for "alienation." We have already noted Tillich's description of man as "estranged from the ground of being, from other beings, and from himself."⁵²

It is also Tillich who suggests a phrasing of the Gospel which brings it into antiphonal relation with life seen under the rubric of estrangement or alienation. He notes the root of the word "salvation" in the Greek salvus, or "healed." Thus, what Christianity offers the world is the message of a "healing reality"⁵³ with the power of "re-uniting what is estranged, giving a center to what is split, overcoming

⁵²Cf. p. 40 above.

⁵³Paul Tillich, Theology of Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 209.

the split between God and man, man and his world, man and himself."⁵⁴
 This "healing reality" is present in the "New Being" who is operative in all times and places but is centered fully in "Jesus as the Christ."⁵⁵ As men encounter the New Being and are drawn into its reality, they experience a fulfillment of their own true being and are reconciled with each other. Tillich also speaks of "healing" in the context of "The Spiritual Presence," i.e., in traditional terms, the Holy Spirit, and points to "the multidimensional unity of life"⁵⁶ which this Presence creates. Salvation as healing has to do not only with the integration of the self, reconciliation with others and participation in the Ground of Being; salvation as healing also has reintegrative power within the individual body and in the concrete realities of the whole process of history.⁵⁷

It is to be noted that this unification of life at its many levels is never complete under the conditions of existence. Disruptive and disintegrative forces are always at work in man and society, threatening the wholeness which the "healing reality" achieves. "Healing is fragmentary in all its forms . . . and stands under the 'in spite of' of which the Cross of Christ is the symbol."⁵⁸ Total and universal healing is an eschatological reality, waiting "beyond history."

⁵⁴Tillich, Systematic Theology, II, 166.

⁵⁵Ibid., II, 166-167.

⁵⁶Ibid., III, 277.

⁵⁷Ibid., III, 282.

⁵⁸Ibid.

b. Anxiety and Certitude. "Anxiety" is a comprehensive reality which embraces other elements in the structure of man's existence. Tillich defines it as "the state in which a being becomes aware of its possible nonbeing," or, again, as "finitude experienced as one's own finitude."⁵⁹ Unlike fear, it has no specific object but is characterized by a pervasive, "free-floating" quality.⁶⁰ Tillich's analysis of this state includes reference to such elements as awareness of contingency, the feeling of insecurity and "homelessness," the sense of emptiness and meaninglessness, doubt, and guilt.⁶¹ Anxiety is the mark of man's inescapable "boundary situation," where his life is always under "ultimate threat."⁶²

Ebeling appears to be dealing with the same reality which Tillich discusses under the rubric of "anxiety" when he speaks of the "radical questionableness" under which man lives.⁶³ This "questionableness" pertains not only to the fact that man must render account for his life but, more broadly, to "the unintelligibility of reality as a whole," of which the supreme symbol is the idea of deus absconditus, "the absent God."⁶⁴ Man's life today is characterized by

⁵⁹Tillich, The Courage to Be, p. 35.

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 36-39. ⁶¹Ibid., pp. 43-54.

⁶²Ibid., p. 195.

⁶³Gerhard Ebeling, "Theology and the Evidentness of the Ethical," Journal for Theology and Church, II (1965), 124.

⁶⁴Ibid.

radical doubt and the breakdown of a coherent sense of meaning.

In his anxious and questionable "boundary situation," man hears the Gospel as a Word which brings him certitude.⁶⁵ It does not extricate him from his radically threatened situation, but, according to Ebeling,

Faith gives certainty to existence, indeed it is really nothing else but existence in certainty The certainty of faith is a certainty that concerns our very existence, it is taking sure steps although no road is visible, hoping although there is nothing to look for, refusing to despair although things are desperate, having ground under us although we step into the bottomless abyss.⁶⁶

This faith which brings certitude springs from the address of the God who "encounters us as pure word," thus freeing us from bondage to the deus absconditus, who encounters us as "pure question."⁶⁷ More precisely, this liberating Word reaches us through Jesus, who is not the "object of faith, but the source of faith."⁶⁸ The historical Jesus in his life and death is the "witness of faith"⁶⁹ and, thereby, "the Word

⁶⁵"Certitude" is deliberately used here instead of "certainty"--the word chosen by Ebeling's translators. Webster distinguishes between the two as follows: "CERTAINTY may stress the existence of objective unquestionable proofs, CERTITUDE may stress a faith strong enough to resist all attacks." Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary, p. 136.

⁶⁶Gerhard Ebeling, Word and Faith (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), p. 240.

⁶⁷Ebeling, "Theology and the Evidentness of the Ethical," p.125.

⁶⁸Ebeling, The Nature of Faith, p. 47.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 57.

which makes us certain."⁷⁰ It is Jesus' witness to faith which opens up the possibility of living in the midst of the total "questionableness" of existence with "the certainty that you are taking your stand on what is ultimately valid and reliable."⁷¹

Tillich's articulation of the Gospel as antiphon to anxiety takes the form of the affirmation of power for "the courage to be." He asks,

Is there a courage which can conquer the anxiety of meaninglessness and doubt? . . . can the faith which accepts acceptance resist the power of nonbeing in its most radical form? Can faith resist meaninglessness? Is there a kind of faith which can exist together with doubt and meaninglessness?⁷²

His answer to these questions is affirmative, but "courage," or "faith," is by no means a simplistic resolution of the problem of anxiety. The "courage to be" resists the threat of meaninglessness, but does not destroy it. Faith coexists with doubt; it does not abolish it. In fact, courage, or, faith manifests itself precisely in accepting anxiety, meaninglessness and doubt as permanent and inescapable realities beyond which one cannot see. In this connection, Tillich transposes the Reformation formulation, "he who sins is justified," into the promise, "he who is in doubt is justified."⁷³ Just as the sinner remains a sinner, though justified, so the doubter remains

⁷⁰Ebeling, Theology and Proclamation, p. 80.

⁷¹Ebeling, The Nature of Faith, p. 131.

⁷²Tillich, The Courage to Be, p. 174.

⁷³Paul Tillich, The Protestant Era (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. ALV.

a doubter. Indeed, the very act of affirming the negativities of existence is a sign that one is participating in "the power of Being," the theological symbol for which is "the God above God."⁷⁴ The christological form of this symbol is "the Crucified who cried to God who remained his God after the God of confidence had left him in the darkness of doubt and meaninglessness."⁷⁵ Jesus as the Christ is "the power of Being" actualized as "the New Being,"⁷⁶ under the tragic and destructive conditions of existence. Those "who participate in him participate in the New Being," though likewise under the broken and incomplete circumstances of actual life.⁷⁷ From the One who was able to take anxiety in all its forms upon himself there comes power to live with courage in "the boundary situation."

c. Despair and Hope. Ebeling has declared that the "question of certainty is raised in its most crucial form with regard to the future."⁷⁸ To face the future bereft of all certainty is to exist in despair. Tillich calls despair the fulfillment of anxiety in all its forms. It represents not only the closing in of doubt, meaninglessness and guilt in the present moment, but, in addition, "no way out into the

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 74.

⁷⁵Tillich, The Courage to Be, p. 188.

⁷⁶Tillich, Systematic Theology, II, 10, 114.

⁷⁷Ibid., II, 118.

⁷⁸Ebeling, Theology and Proclamation, p. 86.

future appears."⁷⁹ Despair sees existence as locked irretrievably within the realities which the past has built into the present. There is "no exit" from such a situation. Jürgen Moltmann sees "hopelessness, resignation, inertia and melancholy" as signs of the presence of despair.⁸⁰ Despair is not unrelated to hope, but it is the "premature, arbitrary anticipation of the non-fulfilment of what we hope for from God."⁸¹ It concludes that present reality represents the termination of every prospect, the closure of all possibility, the exhaustion of all potentiality. In despair, we see "the rigidifying and freezing of the truly human element, which hope alone can keep flowing and free."⁸² Despair is thus a "little death" and finds in actual death its final symbol.

Moltmann can be taken as representative of a tendency in contemporary theology to articulate the Gospel, over against despair, in terms of hope. Basic to his formulation is his distinction between "epiphany religions and faith in terms of promise."⁸³ In an epiphany religion, the self-disclosure of the deity is complete, and the worshipper participates in the deity's eternal being by entering into sacred rites at a cultic site hallowed by the epiphany. In biblical

⁷⁹ Tillich, The Courage to Be, p. 54.

⁸⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, Theology of Hope (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 22.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Quoted from Joseph Pieper in Ibid., p. 23.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 95.

religion, by contrast, the stress is not so much on the fullness of God's self-manifestation as upon the promise which is heard in the revelatory event. There occurs, not a bringing of man's threatened present life into touch with an immutable eternity, "but a break-away from the present toward the future."⁸⁴ Present reality is now neither the occasion for despair nor the time and place of utopian fulfilment, either of which would mean the negation of hope. The present is rather the moment in which God speaks the Word of promise which opens up to man a future hitherto closed. The God of promise presses man to live eschatologically, "in expectation of the manifestation and fulfilment of a promised future."⁸⁵

The God of promise, whom we meet throughout the history of Israel, addresses himself to man with new power in the coming of Jesus. Jesus' whole ministry, death and resurrection constitute an "event of promise."⁸⁶ The future which had been opened up to Israel through God's promises is now at hand for all men. The promises are universalized.⁸⁷ Especially in the resurrection are man's expectations for the future given new force. The ultimate meaning of the resurrection lies in its eschatological nature: it points to a future in which there waits "a new possibility altogether for the world, for existence and for history."⁸⁸ The defeat of death at Easter represents

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 100.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 109.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 158.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 147.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 179.

"the negation of the negative."⁸⁹ What will be is now seen as undetermined by the grim reality of what has been or the desperate appearance of what is. Reality, however harsh and destructive, bears, like the Cross of Jesus, a "latency" whose "tendency" the Easter event makes manifest.⁹⁰ Thus, hope is able to "see reality and mankind in the hand of him whose voice calls into history from its end, 'Behold, I make all things new. . . .'"⁹¹

Yet, as Moltmann repeatedly emphasizes, hope must not be confused with fulfilment. Hope must always live with the apparent contradiction of the promises to which it holds. The Kingdom of God is, in this world, forever "hidden beneath its opposite."⁹² But because hope has already glimpsed the future in the resurrection, "the event of promise," it is ready to bear "'the cross of the present.' It can hold to what is dead, and hope for the unexpected. It can approve of movement and be glad of history."⁹³ Thus, the Gospel as hope becomes for man the "antiphon" of despair. It offers him freedom to move out of the prison of his past and present into a future whose only horizon is God's promise of "a new heaven and a new earth."

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 211.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 203.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 26.

⁹²Ibid., p. 223.

⁹³Ibid., p. 31.

C. CRITERIA FOR PREACHING GOSPEL TODAY

Drawing upon both the heritage from Luther and contemporary discussion, we now list five criteria for the preaching of Gospel today:

1. The offer of forgiveness will be an essential dimension of the preaching of Gospel today.

We have seen that the Gospel as forgiveness, or justification, was the dominant motif in Luther's preaching, correlative to his primary understanding of the Law as judgment. Contemporary theology continues to deal with the categories of sin and grace, guilt and forgiveness. The insights of depth psychology offer evidence that the troubled conscience is not a phenomenon of ancient and medieval man only. Guilt appears to be endemic to the human condition. There is, therefore, a continuing need for men to hear what the Gospel has proclaimed from the beginning: that God does not hold our offenses against us but reaches toward us with a love we can neither merit nor destroy. To preach the Gospel as forgiveness preserves what Tillich calls the "in spite of" character at its heart: God's affirmation of man is always made over against man's negation of God.

2. The Gospel as "antiphon to existence" will be lifted to new prominence in preaching today.

Though guilt is a pervasive sign of man's life in the world, it is not the sign under which many today first experience the

"questionableness" of their existence, nor does it point adequately to other important dimensions of the "structures of existence." Man may experience the negativities of his "humanness" primarily in terms of alienation, anxiety or despair. Just as it is a function of the Law today to "mirror" for man such aspects of his condition, so it becomes a task of the Gospel to respond antiphonally with appropriate affirmations. There will be as close a correlation as possible between motifs of the Gospel chosen for stress and the aspects of existence which have been reflected in the preaching of Law. We noted examples of such correlation in the pairings alienation/unification, anxiety/certitude, and despair/hope. Others, of course, are possible, and it becomes the task of the preacher to match his articulations of Law as "mirror" and Gospel as "antiphon" as sensitively and precisely as he can. It will also be important for the preacher to preserve-- analogous to the "in spite of" character of the Gospel as forgiveness-- the "in the midst of" character of the Gospel as "antiphon." He will avoid the false promise that the Gospel resolves the tensions or removes the ambiguities of existence. He will rather help men see how the Gospel makes healing, certitude or hope possible even while their contraries are unabatedly present.

3. The preaching of Gospel today will find its focus in the person and work of Jesus.

This criterion reflects, of course, the christocentricity of Luther's formulation of the Gospel. We have seen how, for him, there

simply is no gracious God available to us except in "this man Jesus Christ." Contemporary theology likewise sees Jesus' life, death and resurrection as central to the Christian proclamation.

The centrality of Jesus is usually expressed in terms of the Gospel as forgiveness. This has been the chief point of various doctrines of atonement with their special focus on the Cross. It is significant that those theologians to whom we have turned for illustrations of the Gospel as "antiphon" are no less insistent upon the crucial importance of Jesus. He is the bearer of "the New Being," through whom men find healing for their brokenness. He is the "witness of faith," who is the source of our own possibility of living with certitude. He is the "event of Promise," who, especially through his resurrection, frees men from despair and opens to them the future.

The christocentricity of a sermon will not be measured by computing the number of times the name of Jesus is mentioned in its course. This would be legalistic and would tacitly deny the continuity between God's revelation in Christ and His revelation elsewhere in nature and history. Yet, the preacher of Gospel will not be so reticent about "naming the Name" that he obscures the central position of Jesus in the kerygma.

4. The preacher of Gospel today will search for an idiom which is intelligible to contemporary man.

Here the preacher faces the problem of what has been called "the language of Canaan." It is particularly acute in the

proclamation of the Gospel as forgiveness. There is at hand a time honored vocabulary including such terms as redemption, atonement, propitiation and justification. All of these are metaphorical words drawn from areas of experience relatively foreign to modern man.

The preacher can, of course, try to rehabilitate this traditional language by acquainting his hearers with the actualities of the secular or cultic life from which it originally came. He can also follow the lead of interpreters such as Tillich and Ebeling in struggling to find "non-religious language" to carry the meanings to which traditional language points. Here, fidelity to Luther and to the biblical witnesses is not to be measured by the repetition of their formulations but by the integrity with which new idioms communicate in our day the reality their idioms communicated at an earlier time.

5. The Gospel will be brought to the hearer as directly and personally as possible.

Here, Luther's insistence upon the "for me" character of the Gospel offers a guideline for the preacher. The Gospel is not to be proclaimed "in general" or in abstracto. Just as the Law is to be preached so directly and concretely that no one can evade the questions it holds over his life, so the Gospel is to be preached so directly and personally that no person whose life is placed under question will fail to hear that the promises of God are specifically for him. How this is to happen will become more clear as we move to an analysis of the preaching of Hoffmann and Steimle. But whatever

the technique, the preacher of Gospel will be attentive to Luther's demand that the sermon be, as we would characterize it today, communication in the direct, personal "I-Thou" mode.⁹⁴

⁹⁴Cf. H. H. Farmer's discussion of this concept in relation to preaching in H. H. Farmer, The Servant of the Word (Welwyn: Nisbet, 1941), pp. 35-92.

CHAPTER IV

THE PREACHING OF GOSPEL IN HOFFMANN AND STEIMLE

On the basis of our work with the concept of Gospel in Luther and in selected contemporary theologians, we turn now to an analysis of the sermons of Hoffmann and Steimle. We will ask how, as against their preaching of Law, they give homiletical expression to Gospel. First, we will survey each collection for articulations of Gospel as forgiveness of sin, correlative to the preaching of Law as judgment. Next, we will examine the sermons for the ways in which each preacher voices the Gospel as "antiphon" to those realities, other than guilt, which he has mirrored in the Law preached as "description of existence." Finally, we will measure each man's preaching of Gospel against the criteria we have proposed at the end of the preceding chapter.

A. THE GOSPEL AS FORGIVENESS OF SIN

1. Oswald Hoffmann.

We noted in Chapter II Hoffmann's strong preference for preaching Law as judgment. It could be anticipated, therefore, that his characteristic way of preaching Gospel will be as forgiveness, or justification. This, in fact, turns out to be the case. Whereas there are only scattered articulations of the Gospel as "antiphon to existence," there is scarcely a sermon without passages which declare the Gospel in terms of the forgiveness of sin. There is no

question that sin and guilt are the primary factors in Hoffmann's diagnosis of man's condition. He hears man today, beneath all the layers of his modernity, asking essentially the question which tortured Luther: "How can I find a gracious God?" He preaches Gospel as a direct answer to that question.

We will begin our description of Hoffmann's preaching of Gospel with a rather detailed examination of a single sermon. We do it, in part, because it is representative of his handling of judgment and forgiveness, and, in part, because Steimle has a sermon on the same text to which we will turn later in the chapter. The sermon is entitled, "Which Is Easier?", and is an exposition of the story of the healing of the paralytic in Matthew 9:1-8.

Hoffmann begins with the observation that it is difficult for us, as it was for the people of Jesus' own time, to believe that He possessed the power people ascribed to Him. There follows, then, a retelling of the Matthaean narrative with occasional contemporary touches, through which Hoffmann seeks to make two points: (1) the story shows the faith of the men who carried their paralyzed friend to Jesus; and, (2) it reveals Jesus' compassion toward the suffering of others. ("Suffering did not turn His stomach.")¹

The preacher then picks up the odd (to us) fact that Jesus says to the man, "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you," before doing anything about his paralysis. It is a sign, as the

¹Oswald Hoffmann, "Which Is Easier?", p. 2. All of Hoffmann's sermons are printed by (St. Louis: Lutheran Laymen's League, 1968).

unfolding story makes plain, that "He knows what the matter is with all of us a good deal better than we know ourselves."² Jesus knows that curing us of some physical ailment won't penetrate to the root of our problem, so He does the thing uniquely in His power to do--He declares forgiveness. He can do this because of who He is:

When He talked, He talked for God. When He acted, He acted for God. He was God in every sense of the word.³

But Jesus' divine nature does not prevent Him from participating in our existence. In fact, His condescension to us is the measure of grace:

He became man for this, to be a man among men; to be a man for men. He literally came to take our place, yours and mine. He took it all, right down to the death each one of us is destined to die. As a man, He was obedient to His Father for all of us who are disobedient sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father. He was obedient even unto death, the death of a common criminal. He died for us This is the Savior of the world as portrayed in the Bible; a real man with a big heart, so big that it includes everyone, even you.⁴

This statement of the Gospel closes out the first half of the sermon. The second half consists of passages in which judgment, description of our condition and assurances of God's grace alternate. Hoffmann wants us to see how desperately we need the forgiveness which the Gospel offers us. We must "get wise" to a fundamental fact: the time between the cradle and the grave is only a "hyphen." Time may run out on us! We may miss the opportunity to come to this Lord who understands our deepest needs. The alternatives to what He offers us are such ultimately unsatisfying options as eating up our lives "in

²Ibid., p. 3. ³Ibid. ⁴Ibid.

front of the television tube," burying ourselves in our work, trying to drown our need in "another cocktail or a couple of beers," or adding "a little spice to life" with an extra-marital affair.⁵ But over against such deceptive possibilities there stands the gracious God whose way with us is portrayed in Jesus' healing of the paralytic. Hoffmann then closes the sermon with a series of reiterations of the offer of forgiveness:

The great God who made this world of ours has a heart for you. He really does. Son, daughter, your sins are forgiven you.

You belong, not because you deserve to belong, but because the Son of God paid a big price for you. Out of love for you, He atoned for what you have done wrong. In Him you have been made acceptable to God.

God takes you as you are. He forgives, He cleanses, He accepts. . . . Take it from His generous hand and live by faith in Him: your sins, my friend, are forgiven.⁶

Already in the passages quoted, several characteristics of Hoffmann's preaching of Gospel as forgiveness are apparent. There is, for example, the directness of address, with its generous use of the second person pronoun. There is also the mixture of a warm, human vocabulary ("the great God . . . has a heart for you.") with the language of traditional theology and piety (" . . . The Son of God paid a big price for you He atoned for what you have done wrong.") We will reserve further comment on these matters until our appraisal of Hoffmann as a preacher of Gospel. Here we want to take further note of the centrality of the person and work of Christ in Hoffmann's proclamation of Gospel as forgiveness, of which the sermon

⁵Ibid., p. 5.

⁶Ibid., pp. 5-6.

on Matthew 9:1-8 is but an instance.

The theme of Jesus as the unique bearer of God's grace to the world and, therefore, as man's only Redeemer, dominates Hoffmann's preaching. In an Epiphany sermon, for example, he develops a theme we have already seen to be crucial for Luther's understanding of Gospel: the knowledge that there is a forgiving God is not something to which man comes by way of reason or speculation: it is revealed to him through the Incarnation. To know God's heart, Luther declared, one must "run to the manger." Hoffmann, interpreting the quest of the Magi, puts it this way:

Wise men look to God for grace. It is the only alternative to despair. . . . Where do we look for the grace of God? To a manger in a little town in a far away country at a definite time in our history. We're talking about revelation, the revelation of God Himself in Jesus Christ, whose forgiveness and love open all the doors--the doors of the present and of the future, the doors of understanding both of ourselves and of God, the doors to life and salvation.⁷

It is not only to the manger, however, that we are to repair for the revelation of the grace of God. The whole of our Lord's life, as Hoffmann views it, was so lived that it unveils for us the mystery of the Gospel. Thus, the point of the miracles (as we have already seen in Hoffmann's exposition of the healing of the paralytic) is not that Jesus was able, in ancient times, to heal a few diseased people of their ills. Rather, the miracle stories are parabolic of the fact that "the way of the Lord is the way of grace, of goodness unexpected

⁷ Oswald Hoffmann, "Wise Men Come to Praise," pp. 5-6.

and of forgiveness undeserved."⁸ Jesus' healing of the leper, for example, is actually a sign of something infinitely more significant than the incident itself:

In the person of Jesus Christ, God Himself burst upon the scene. When you look at Jesus Christ, you see God in action. That is the meaning of everything you read about Jesus Christ in the New Testament, everything He said and everything He did Look at Christ and see God in action. Look at Christ: This is the way God feels about you, this is how God feels toward you. He cares about you.⁹

The same theme is picked up in Hoffmann's interpretation of the transfiguration. Here his attention is devoted equally to the mysterious events on the mountain and to the healing of the epileptic boy which followed in the valley below. In the cloud of glory which enveloped Jesus as He talked with Moses and Elijah, we learn that "the man on the mountain is the Son of God and the Savior of the world."¹⁰ But He did not remain in splendor upon the heights. He descended with Peter, James and John to where the people were, and there, with the milling crowd around Him, we see Him from a different perspective.

He did not look like God that day, on the dusty road, healing the boy, but He was. He did not look like God, hanging there on a cross, but He was. What He did, God did. What He suffered, God suffered. When He died, God died. Now that He is risen from the dead every man can know that the living God loves this old world of ours.¹¹

⁸Oswald Hoffmann, "Dare to Ask. Dare to Touch," p. 2.

⁹Ibid., pp. 3, 5.

¹⁰Oswald Hoffmann, "The Man on the Mountain," p. 4.

¹¹Ibid., p. 4.

Such a way of stating the case raises a serious theological question, namely, whether one can so totally merge the identities of Jesus and God that he is driven to say that "God died" in the death of Jesus. Nevertheless, this passage, in part because of its exaggerated phrasing, expresses Hoffmann's concern to relate the revelation of grace to the Cross. It would not be easy to derive from his sermons a consistent, systematic doctrine of the place of the Cross in the Gospel as forgiveness. Sometimes a single passage will offer an array of images drawn from "doctrines of the atonement" rooted in such various analogies as courts of law ("justified"), the cult of animal sacrifice ("substitutionary sacrifice") and the ransoming of slaves or prisoners ("paid the price"):

He paid the price for all your mistakes. He atoned, as the Bible puts it, for your sins. People like you and me are justified, put right with God, freely by His grace in Jesus Christ, whom God sent forth to be a substitutionary sacrifice for our sins.¹²

One theme which does recur, however, is the presentation of Jesus as the innocent One who at the Cross took upon Himself the penalty for sin which guilty man deserves. It is akin to the idea of a radical exchange of roles, already noted in Luther, whereby Christ became "my Law, my sin and my death" in order to set me free from these very tyrants. In such passages, Hoffmann leans strongly toward a substitutionary theory of the atonement:

. . . He ranged Himself alongside all of us sinners--all of us, everyone The Son of God became a sinner like everyone of us. That is the Good News of the Gospel. He committed no sin

¹²Oswald Hoffmann, "Phony Families," p. 4.

Himself, but He was a sinner for everyone of us. He took our sins upon Himself, as no one ever possibly could or would. He laid down His innocent life for our sins, yours and mine. That is the meaning of His cross. He bore in His own body our sins upon that cross, that we might accept His forgiveness, follow Him in faith, make a clean break with sin ourselves, and live righteously in this present world. . . .¹³

2. Edmund Steimle.

Nowhere is the contrast between the preaching of Hoffmann and Steimle more striking than in the way they proclaim Gospel as forgiveness. To begin with, the instances in which Steimle directs the Gospel precisely to the problem of guilt are considerably less frequent than is the case with Hoffmann. This is not to say that this dimension of grace is missing in the Steimle sermons. It is rather the fact that he addresses the Gospel to a spectrum of human need which is far broader than guilt. In fact, the passages in which he presents the Gospel as antiphon to elements of human existence other than guilt are more than double the number of those in which the troubled conscience is his target. With Hoffmann, the ratio of references in the sermons analyzed is weighted even more heavily in the reverse direction.

Since Hoffmann's sermon on the healing of the paralytic has been before us, we will begin the examination of Steimle's preaching of forgiveness with a detailed sketch of his sermon on the same text. This

¹³Oswald Hoffmann, "Stuck on Yourself," p. 5. Cf. "In His death there is forgiveness for all the inhumanity, the violence, the transgression, and the sin. Jesus Christ took it all into His own human body on that brutal Cross of His, and now there is healing for all in Him." (Oswald Hoffmann, "Healing In Christ: You and God," p. 4.)

will enable us to compare his way of dealing with the problem of guilt with Hoffmann's and will, at the same time, introduce us to some of the characteristic themes of his preaching of forgiveness.

The sermon begins with Jesus' own question to the crowd: "For which is easier, to say your sins are forgiven; or to say arise and walk?" The fact that forgiveness is declared in hundreds of thousands of churches Sunday after Sunday but the rarity of occasions on which paralytics walk at a word of command makes the answer self-evident; but Steimle proposes that we look at it anyway.

In the first place, the story throws into contrast Jesus' assessment of human need and ours. Never minimizing or neglecting physical distress, He nonetheless saw the primacy of man's spiritual (not "other-worldly") need. In fact, the two were always inseparably linked in Jesus' eyes. He knew, for example, that there was "not much to be gained . . . in healing this man's paralysis if thenceforth he was to walk around on sound legs but with emptiness in his eyes, not knowing where he should walk or why."¹⁴

Steimle notes, by contrast, how our society tends to devote primary attention to alleviating men's physical ills. Hospitals, health services, disaster relief, social security and many other humanitarian enterprises are commendable signs of our success in getting people, in one way or another, to "arise and walk." But, with equal concreteness, he establishes his diagnosis that "for all that

¹⁴Edmund A. Steimle, Are You Looking For God? (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), p. 32.

and all that, we find that, in this enlightened and physically comfortable year of our Lord, the eyes of men are frighteningly empty and fearful."¹⁵ We have tried to cover over the sickness that infests our souls and our whole society with flights into entertainment or work, or, failing escape, by trips to the psychiatrist. There we may be brought to confront the unpleasant reality of our condition and be told to accept it, but, Steimle asks, "Who will cleanse it?"

Thus, in "the healthiest, longest-lived, most comfortable, and most efficient society the world has perhaps ever known,"¹⁶ we are brought face to face with the problem of sin. Steimle eschews discussion of "its more obvious expressions" and declares its essence to be the denial that God means us to have exactly where we are the gifts of joy and meaning. Sin is: "Your life, my life, disfigured by the denial that it is within itself valuable, significant, and even beautiful in the eyes of God."¹⁷ This disfigurement, he declares, is not in our power to set right. Its remedy lies in "the easiest, the cheapest (in our ordinary use of the term), yet the most profound word in the Christian vocabulary"¹⁸--forgiveness.

Thus, the stage is set for Steimle to announce the Gospel as forgiveness. He does so in terms of "acceptance." Reduced to its essence, forgiveness means that God accepts a person not because of any of the marks of distinction toward which we ordinarily strive, but

¹⁵Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 37.

¹⁸Ibid.

because, in His eyes, each person is unique and "infinitely worthwhile." What this means is interpreted through an analogy:

The simplest and, I suppose, still the best analogy is the young child who is blessed with wise and loving parents; the child who, regardless of whether he is dull witted or bright, homely or handsome, devilish or well-behaved, knows that he is accepted, loved and constantly forgiven by his parents. And it is that child who, with an assurance he does not consciously recognize, bounds out of the house to play in the sun or hops off to school in the rain, not even aware that the reason why his life has daily joy and purpose and direction is just because he is accepted, forgiven and loved.¹⁹

At the cross, we see that this acceptance isn't simply to be taken for granted: "It costs." Rejection, suffering and death were required in order to bring our defenses down and to make us "willing to accept the fact that we are accepted just as we are."²⁰ But we are not to remain prostrate at the foot of the cross. The experience of forgiveness sends us back into the same world from which we came, but now ready to face its problems with "purpose and meaning in our eyes . . . joy in our hearts and a song on our lips"²¹

Clearly evident in Steimle's sermon on the healing of the paralytic is the contrast between the language with which he articulates forgiveness and that employed by Hoffmann. There is an absolute absence here and throughout the collection of phrases drawn from traditional doctrines of the atonement. Steimle obviously finds greater homiletical usefulness in Tillich's translation of justification by faith into the formulation "accepting the fact that you are accepted,

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 37-38.

²⁰Ibid., p. 38.

²¹Ibid.

though unacceptable."²² What Steimle does analogically through the image of the carefree child in the sermon just outlined, occurs in more explicit terms in this passage from another sermon:

The Christian . . . knows an inner serenity. He takes death and this business of being 'found out' (which is what judgment really means) into account, brings it out into the open and into the present tense. For the God who will face him then at the end of the road, when he will be seen without any pretense or defense, sees him now for what he really is and accepts him (which is what forgiveness really means). And what a relief that is here and now, to know that there is one who sees us just as we are, who sees us as we are unwilling for anyone else to see us, in a way we are unwilling even to see ourselves, and accepts us! Then the silly pretensions, this futile business of constantly trying to justify ourselves, are seen for what they are, and we can accept ourselves because God sees us and accepts us just as we are.²³

It is a striking fact that none of the material quoted to this point as representative of Steimle's preaching of forgiveness makes direct reference to Jesus Christ. The person and work of Jesus are, of course, implied in the sermon on the healing of the paralytic, since the whole message grows out of a pericope in which Jesus forgave a man's sins. There are also references to the Cross as somehow involved in the reality of forgiveness. But it is to be noted that even here there is a reticence to name the name of Jesus which is in sharpest contrast to Hoffmann's consistent method of bringing Christ, Cross and

²²Cf. p. 108 above.

²³Edmund A. Steimle, Disturbed by Joy (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), pp. 97-98. Cf. "How incomprehensible is this amazing patience of his which will suffer our harried pettiness and our frantic indifference to him and then at the end of the day be ready, once again, to hear our prayers of contrition and remorse for all our hurried failures and stupidities and--wonder of wonders!--be willing to accept them." (Ibid., p. 145.)

forgiveness into the closest and most explicit connection. Steimle, in the sermon on the healing of the paralytic, simply observes that forgiveness is "what draws men constantly to the cross, for in its shadow there is a strange peace,"²⁴ and proceeds at once to talk about "acceptance" and to develop the analogy of the child. Following the analogy, he returns to the Cross, but again what he says is subtle and low-keyed:

This is the assurance, the 'peace of mind,' if you like, the cross bestows upon those who linger in its shadow. For here we know it doesn't come easily. It costs. It costs suffering and rejection and death before we kneel down and accept it, before our defenses come down and we are willing to accept the fact that we are accepted just as we are.²⁵

Here we are far away from ransom or substitutionary theories of the atonement. The Cross is held before us as a symbol of a Love which judges us by its very depth and intensity, even while it accepts us.

It is significant that in at least two instances where Steimle does bring Jesus and the Gospel as forgiveness together, it is not in terms of a doctrine of the atonement but rather by way of a New Testament picture of Jesus actually dealing mercifully with men. In the first instance, Steimle uses the Gospel accounts of Jesus' approach to the rich young ruler and to Peter as paradigms of God's way with us:

The remarkable thing about it is that our Lord loved the rich young man who turned away, just as he loved Peter who sacrificed everything but wanted to tally up what was in it for him, just as

²⁴Steimle, Are You Looking for God? p. 37.

²⁵Ibid., p. 38.

God loves us with our alternating moods of faith too little and too late, of sacrifice, of calculating self-interest. And it's that kind of love we are asked to trust here. [The parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard.]²⁶

The second instance occurs in an Easter sermon. Steimle has developed the idea that Easter brings judgment before it brings joy. He suggests that one reason why the disciples were terror-struck at the news of the Resurrection was that now their denials and desertions, which they had in a sense buried with Jesus' body, would all be in the open again:

And so the most characteristic initial word on Easter is not, 'Be of good cheer,' but, 'Be not afraid.' For the one who returns, who brings it all back to life again, who permits no escape into death, who allows no burial, no forgetting, is the one we know. And with recognition, the fear, the embarrassment, turns into joy: 'Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.' For now despite the judgment, the bringing alive of all he had been and of all they had done, they knew they could trust that the judgment he brought alive was the judgment of love. So Easter becomes a commentary on John's words, 'There is no fear in love, for perfect love casteth out fear.'²⁷

Even here, where Cross and Resurrection are very much in the foreground, Steimle appears to see the person and work of Jesus more in terms of what they reveal of God's forgiving love than in terms of an objective atonement they effect. More precisely, the effect is in the revelation.

In all of the sermons which touch upon the matter of forgiveness, Steimle's intent appears to be to present the Christian message as fundamentally a gift and not a demand. He sees this as the

²⁶Steimle, Disturbed by Joy, p. 129.

²⁷Ibid., p. 88.

essential meaning of "justification by grace through faith." The content of the Gospel is the offer of an acceptance we can never deserve, not the requirement of an obedience we can never achieve. There are, to be sure, exacting demands which grow out of the Gospel, but always the gift of unearned grace is prior: "The gift of the child at Bethlehem came before the call to take up his cross. The invitation to the wedding feast came before the demand for a wedding garment."²⁸ Steimle develops this theme in a sermon on Matthew 11:28-30, a passage which we have already seen to be one of Luther's favorite affirmations of the Gospel. Steimle is speaking about the way in which Christ's easy yoke "fits our situation with respect to sin":

It takes full cognizance of the depth of our rebellion against God, the pride and pettiness inside each of us, looks steadily into our souls to see us exactly as we are, sees us in a way we are unwilling even to see ourselves, and still says, 'All right. Come and trust me anyway--just the way you are. . . . You don't have to pretend anymore--pretend that you're better than you really are (or worse!) since God certainly knows you're not! No need to play games any longer. God sees you for what you are and accepts you 'as is.'²⁹

B. THE GOSPEL AS ANTIPHON TO EXISTENCE

1. Oswald Hoffmann.

It is not surprising, in the light of what we have discovered to this point about Hoffmann's preaching of Law and Gospel, that the proclamation of Gospel as "antiphon to existence" is a subordinate

²⁸Ibid., p. 29.

²⁹Steimle, Are You Looking for God? p. 63.

theme in his sermons. This fact corresponds directly to the relatively light use he makes of Law as "mirror of existence." Law as judgment and Gospel as forgiveness have overwhelming priority in his preaching. Yet, his sermons are not totally devoid of articulations of Gospel in terms other than forgiveness or justification. We have noted, in Chapter Two, the occasional attention he gives to such structures of existence as alienation, despair, meaninglessness and transiency. We will now examine how he correlates the Gospel in response to them. More particularly, we will look for evidence of affirmations of unification, hope, meaning and enduringness--the appropriate Gospel "antiphons" to the structures of existence just listed.

a. Unification. "Alienation" and "unification" are the correlates we used in Chapter Three to illustrate one aspect of the antiphonal character of the Gospel. Hoffmann prefers the terms "brokenness" and "healing," but the realities portrayed are the same. We have noted in Chapter Two that the existentialist theme of "brokenness" or "alienation" receives some attention in a series of three sermons under the general theme, "Healing In Christ." It is in these same sermons, as this theme indicates, that Hoffmann gives some articulation of the Gospel as an antiphon to the fragmented condition of man's life in both its personal and social dimensions. The text for all three sermons is Titus 2:11-14, with particular focus on the opening clause: "For the grace of God has dawned upon the world with healing for all mankind. . . ."

The sermons develop along roughly parallel lines. They begin with some description of the brokenness of our world and the estrangements which mark our lives and move quickly to establish our responsibility for this condition in which we find ourselves. The root of all brokenness lies in our sinful rebellion against God; therefore, there can be no healing in any other dimension of existence until this split at the heart of things is closed.

Hoffmann announces the Gospel as the answer to man's plight: "Both the healing and the good news of it come straight from the heart of God. . . ." ³⁰ At one level, this offer of healing is directed toward the individual in his sense of alienation from the world:

Do you feel trapped by life, turned in upon yourself, feeling the creaturliness [sic] and the loneliness of your being? Do you feel that you are unaccepted and unacceptable? Unloved and unlovable? Well, here is God in Jesus Christ saying to you right now: 'My grace that brings healing and life has dawned upon the world with healing for you and for all mankind.' ³¹

At another level, Hoffmann speaks more generally of healing for the brokenness of "the world." In one sermon, he specifies that Christ brings healing "into the midst of a boiling situation of national antagonism and racial hatred." ³² But it becomes clear, as each sermon develops, that his real concern lies at the point of the individual, not society, and the content he gives to the category of "healing" is almost exclusively "reconciliation with God" through the

³⁰ Oswald Hoffmann, "Healing in Christ: For Yourself," p. 2.

³¹ Hoffmann, "Healing in Christ: You and God," pp. 4-5.

³² Oswald Hoffmann, "Healing in Christ: You and Others," p. 6.

forgiveness of sin. This is made explicit in the paragraph immediately preceding the one we have just quoted:

Salvation in Jesus Christ is rescue from the fate of the rebellious. It is healing from the hurt of brokenness that is in the world. That healing goes to the roots of our being. It is the healing of atonement and of forgiveness, of death and resurrection. It is the healing of body, mind and spirit.³³

That final sentence, with its hint of what Tillich refers to as "the multidimensional unity of life," is left unexpanded.

b. Hope. We have noted Hoffmann's brief attention to despair as a way of describing the human condition in two sermons, "Saved by Hope" and "A Tough Profession." The first of these is the only sermon in which the Gospel is articulated explicitly in terms of hope. The text is Romans 8:24-25: "It was by hope that we were saved; but if we see what we hope for, then it is not really hope. For who hopes for something that he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."

This text becomes the occasion for announcing, against a quickly sketched background of despair, Jesus Christ as the source of man's hope. His advent into the world is "a page that cannot be ripped out of our own history."³⁴ Nor was His appearance among us a matter of chance; He came into the world by "the design of His

³³Ibid., p. 4. Cf. "By His death there is atonement for all the rebellion in the world. In His death there is forgiveness for all the inhumanity, the violence, the transgression, and the sin. Jesus Christ took it all into His own human body on that brutal cross of His, and now there is healing for all in Him." (Ibid.)

³⁴Oswald Hoffmann, "Saved By Hope," p. 2.

Father." Therefore, hope which is based on Christ "is not a nebulous thing, bound to fade away when the winds begin to blow."³⁵ In the midst of personal misfortune and beset by disasters in nature and history, the fact of Jesus Christ stands as a sure sign that hope does not deceive:

If Jesus Christ really lived and died and rose again, as He did, something has happened in this world of ours, and something is going to happen again. Where there was no help before, now there is help. Where people had to live before without God and without hope in the world, now there is forgiveness and life in Jesus Christ. Where people had nothing to look forward to before, now there is the promise, coming from the living God Himself, of a greater tomorrow.³⁶

The link between hope and forgiveness, which appears at the center of the above paragraph, is never far from Hoffmann's attention. Later in this sermon, he relates hope as "God's saving benediction upon our world" to the fact that "Jesus Christ paid the price for human sin and lifted the burden of guilt for every man."³⁷ In another sermon, in which the category of hope appears under the symbol of a "plus sign" which enables a man "to say 'yes' instead of 'no' to life," it is again "the death of Jesus in atonement for all that is wrong in the world, paying the price for your own sins, [that] makes everything different."³⁸

³⁵Ibid., p. 5. ³⁶Ibid., p. 2. ³⁷Ibid., p. 3.

³⁸Oswald Hoffmann, "Say Yes to Life," p. 5. Cf. "A Tough Profession," where the assurance that Christ cares for the lonely and desperate has its base in the prior declaration: "In the death of the Son of God, all innocent on His cross, there is redemption and atonement for everyone." (p. 4).

c. Meaning. Meaninglessness, as Hoffmann depicts it, is the consequence of the chaotic changes rampant in our society. Everywhere old values are being scrambled and old securities overthrown. In the midst of such a topsy-turvy world, men are confused and bewildered. They cry out for some stable sense that life has meaning.

Hoffmann proclaims the message of Christ's cosmic Lordship as the antiphon to man's cry for meaning. In "Hope Not In Politicians," for example, he sets the sovereignty of God as revealed in Jesus Christ over against the inconstancy of all political institutions and all politicians. We are told that "at a time when all things are busting loose, it is high time to trust in the Lord--to remember Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and forever."³⁹ Such trust gives the citizens of a nation the sense that "life has a purpose and that this world has a destiny"⁴⁰ and issues in the responsible exercise of their political obligations.

More sustained treatment of the theme of Christ's Lordship over against the confusions of the present age appears in the sermon, "Who Is In Charge Here?" Appearances to the contrary, Hoffmann declares that life has not gotten out of hand. The pervasive moral confusion and the chaotic state of international affairs are in no sense signs that the world is careening on its way without guidance. In the midst of all the turmoil of modern life, Hoffmann wants one word to be

³⁹Oswald Hoffmann, "Hope Not In Politicians," p. 5.

⁴⁰Ibid.

heard: "Jesus Christ is in charge here."⁴¹ The bulk of the sermon consists of reiterations of that basic affirmation:

The world may be topsy-turvy, and things may be going from bad to worse, under the machinations of evil men and the administrations of some well-intentioned ones who don't have a grip on things, but Jesus Christ is still in charge.⁴²

Whether you see it or not, it is His power that holds things together. In this tormented, shattered world of ours, He holds the loose ends in His hands. He has power to bring order out of chaos. He is in charge.⁴³

He is in charge, and He will see things through. The world is not going to get out of hand. There may be trouble, sorrow, death. He is in charge even of that.⁴⁴

More than any other of the sermons, this one voices the Gospel in terms other than forgiveness. Christ's atoning sacrifice for sin is not absent from Hoffmann's considerations ("In His holy life and innocent death there is forgiveness from God for people like you and me."),⁴⁵ but the sermon is dominated by the antiphony of the world's bewildered cry for meaning and the proclamation of Christ's sovereignty over history.

d. Enduringness. Neither "transiency" nor "enduringness" are terms which Hoffmann uses, but they express a fourth antiphony between Law as description of existence and Gospel as response to it which appears in his preaching. We have noted his description of the transiency of man and his institutions in "Dwelling In Tents." In

⁴¹Oswald Hoffmann, "Who Is In Charge Here?" p. 3.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 3-4.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 4.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 5.

correlation with that transiency, he speaks of the trustworthiness of God's promises. Chiefly, those promises have to do with the forgiveness of sin, but they also represent the sure Word of a God who is not swept away in the flux of life:

If the world should come crashing down, the avalanche would not sweep you with it. Faith in Christ carries on. . . . Have faith and hold to it with patience, because God is faithful. Have faith, and look beyond--beyond the fitful and flashing lightning of trouble, beyond the struggles and strife, beyond the sickness and sorrow, to the real land of promise, the city that has foundations, whose Builder and Maker can be no other than God Himself, the One Who really counts.⁴⁶

Hoffmann gives this reciprocal theme of man's transiency and God's constancy a highly specific application in a sermon entitled, "The Green and the Golden." Its subject is the problem of aging, with Proverbs 16:31 as the text: "The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness." The sermon includes some sensitive evocations of the peculiar plight of the aged--their loss of skill, their sense of being "side-tracked," their feelings of neglect and loneliness. But in the midst of these unwelcome changes, brought about in their circumstances by the inexorable movement of life toward its end, there is a fixed point:

Old as you are, God does not look upon you as a worn-out machine. He does not throw you on the discard pile. He knows the discouragement of men. He took it into His own heart when He sent His Son to be the Savior of the world. He knows, He remembers, He cares.⁴⁷

⁴⁶Oswald Hoffmann, "Dwelling In Tents," p. 6.

⁴⁷Oswald Hoffmann, "The Green and the Golden," p. 4.

But at the end stands "the last enemy," death. The fact that man dies is the surest sign of his transiency, and Hoffmann sees the secret fear of it to be the "chill" of life--like the wind-driven cold in the winter climate of northern Minnesota. Hoffmann addresses this fact of death in the sermon, "Why Die?", based on the concluding verses of Paul's resurrection chapter of I Corinthians 15. The "sting of death" afflicts us all; the "chill" of death is our climate. It is the "bad news" to which every man must finally listen. But Hoffmann wants us to hear also the antiphonal word of God's conquest of death in the resurrection of Jesus. Here God dealt "a death blow to the saddest fact life has to offer."⁴⁸ The risen Christ "takes the wind-chill out of the air" by overcoming in us the fear of death. Death has been robbed of its power over us, because sin, its deadly sting, has been removed through Christ's own death.

2. Edmund Steimle.

Steimle's sermons abound in articulations of the Gospel as "antiphon to existence." In response to the descriptive, non-judgmental use of Law which pervades his sermons, there appears there a varied and flexible interpretation of Gospel. His preaching of Gospel is in no sense locked into (nor is it neglectful of) the theme of guilt and forgiveness. "Gospel" appears to have a wider spectrum of meaning for him than for Hoffmann. At least, he devotes

⁴⁸ Oswald Hoffmann, "Why Die?", p. 4.

considerably more attention than does Hoffmann to developing dimensions of its reality beyond forgiveness.

This wealth of material within the category we have defined as "antiphon to existence" intensifies the problem we noted earlier concerning the imprecision of terms used in describing the structures of existence. In our examination of Steimle's preaching of Law, we chose to use his own images of emptiness, darkness, eeriness and exile. They are at least as capacious and open-ended as such words as alienation, anxiety and despair. Correspondingly, the terms we will select to serve as antiphons to his descriptions of existence must not be required to carry too discrete a burden of meaning. They are symbolic of a wide range of interpretations Steimle gives to the Gospel in his preaching. These headings under which we will order our materials are: fullness, light, trustworthiness and return.

a. Fullness. "Emptiness," in Steimle's preaching, refers to the hollow quality of modern man's life, the vacuum of meaning and vitality hidden beneath a glittering surface. It stands also for the dull ordinariness which saps life of its vigor. "Fullness," however, does not refer, in its primary meaning, to man's life at all. It first of all designates something in the nature of God Himself which stands in radical contrast to man's cramped and empty life.

Steimle seldom uses the word "fullness" for this quality, but he is clearly moving in the direction it suggests in the sermon, "The Extravagant Kindness." Its text is the lyric passage in Ephesians 3:14-21 in which the author extols the multi-dimensional love of God

in Christ, surpassing all human understanding. The incredible lavishness of God's love toward man and the creation is a favorite theme with Steimle, and here he develops it in terms of the prodigality of nature, with its "unnecessary vastness" and beauty, and of the imprudent, excessive grace revealed in the Incarnation.

It is this immeasurable "fullness" of God that answers to the dreary emptiness of man's life. When man enters into the relation with God symbolized by the word "salvation," the vacuum at the center of his life is filled "with new zest, with confidence and purpose and joy."⁴⁹ What had once seemed impossible becomes possible; obscure persons who had been "nobodies" are mysteriously transformed into "somebodies" in whom God's abundant love "spills over" into the life which surrounds them.⁵⁰

One way in which Steimle deals with this theme is by speaking of salvation as "enlargement" or "room." One occasion for such a treatment is a Lenten sermon based on the story of the healing of Bartimaeus. He sees this miracle story as an instance of what Jesus was always doing in His ministry and what He continues to do today:

. . . in sharp contrast to the strange noise and confusion in the world around us in which life seems constantly to be hemmed in, restricted, confined, by death and perplexity and tragedy and emptiness and a lack of purpose and meaning-- .⁵¹ . here was a man who enlarged the lives of those he touched.⁵¹

⁴⁹Steimle, Are You Looking for God? p. 38.

⁵⁰Steimle, Disturbed By Joy, pp. 44-45.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 58.

The tragedy is that we resist this enlargement of our narrow, empty lives, but the Gospel story is also the account of the relentless "attack of grace" (Karl Barth) upon our resistance. God comes with the offer of:

. . . new eyes to see a new world around you, new faces in the old familiar faces you thought you knew so well, eyes to see new openings in the communities in which you live to bring enlargement to the lives of people hemmed in by poverty and injustice and fear and disease and ignorance.⁵²

This "fullness" from God thus has power to transform the "dull and ordinary days" of which our lives so often consist. Its supreme symbol is the Cross, where we get a glimpse of "love that never fails" but "keeps coming back like the return of spring, . . . amazing, undiscourageable, eternal, and triumphant" ⁵³ The shadow of this Cross, with its revelation of God's inexhaustible love, falls across all our days in every circumstance:

It speaks to you in the kitchen with children underfoot; it speaks to you in the office surrounded by reports and filing cabinets; it speaks to you at your wits' end, not knowing how you are going to get through another week; or to you, perhaps, facing the latter part of life lonely and a little afraid.⁵⁴

b. Light. "Darkness" represents for Steimle a wide range of negative elements in human experience. It can be simply the mood of depression that settles over men's hearts, often with no discernible cause; usually it connotes the closing in of experiences in which suffering is a primary component.

⁵²Ibid., p. 63.

⁵³Steimle, Are You Looking for God? p. 127. ⁵⁴Ibid.

The "light" that breaks upon men in their darkness is often visible in part because of the darkness. This is one point Steimle makes in the sermon, "Voices in the Dark," based on Isaiah 40:1-8, with its opening words, "Comfort, comfort my people," spoken to the exiles in Babylon:

The voice broke in on the darkness of their despair as softly and gently as a child born in the out buildings of a village inn.⁵⁵

This is always the way of God with men in their darkest hours. His succor for them in their distress always precedes any demand He makes upon them for obedience. God begins His work with us by assuring us of His faithful love:

And we can receive that assurance, hear the voice of comfort most clearly when we are in the dark, when nothing we do seems to make much sense, when anything demanded of us brings nothing but frustration.⁵⁶

The sign of God's "faithfullove," as of the extravagant "fullness" of that love, is again Jesus upon His Cross. This is fundamentally the resolution Steimle offers to the problem of suffering in the sermon, "Is God As Good As Jesus?" There is no simple answer to the agonizing, "Why?", which men ask out of pain and loss, nor is there any "proof," in the ordinary sense, that the God who permits suffering to exist in His creation is good. But if we can take Jesus as in some sense the "standard" by which to govern our thought about God, then we see in Jesus' own sufferings that

⁵⁵Steimle, Disturbed By Joy, p. 26.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 29.

. . . he [God] did identify himself with us in love so that all our sufferings became his. God knows what it's like, for he is in it with you. God knows what it's like to be you!⁵⁷

Such an approach to the problem of pain implies also that God does not remove suffering from our experience. The darkness will still surround us, but out of the relationship of faith there comes "strength and courage to enter into the struggle with all the dark powers of life and death knowing that the darkness does not have the last word."⁵⁸

c. Trustworthiness. We have seen Steimle's use of "eeriness" to signify the absurd, nightmarish aspect our experience of this world can sometimes assume. Reality looks ugly and distorted; like Jacob at the crossing of the Jabbok, we wrestle with mysterious powers which are faceless and fearful.

Over against this "eerie" quality of man's experience, Steimle sets his conviction that at the heart of the universe there is a Reality that can be trusted. Nowhere in his preaching are there more echoes than here of Luther's insistence that our knowledge of God must begin with His self-revelation in Christ. His sermon on Jacob's experience at Jabbok, for example, is designed to deal with the doctrine of the Trinity, and Steimle insists that the key to "the complicated name of the Trinity is the name of Jesus."⁵⁹ This is where we are to begin in our approach to God. When we do, we learn that

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 168.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 17.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 105.

. . . the Holy One, the creative Power, the ultimate Being, that vague, shadowy, and mysterious One whom we call God had [sic] become focused in a life with us in history. . . . The faceless deity has a "face." The great all-seeing Eye is no longer bleak and expressionless, but looks on us in love.⁶⁰

This means that "in the midst of the madness of these days" we can trust that the Source of all life is One who is with us and for us.

This same theme receives major treatment in an Epiphany sermon based on the account of the stilling of the storm in Matthew 8:23-27. Steimle sees deep wisdom in the fact that the church has selected this lection for a Sunday close to Christmas. In so doing, it has forced us to think of Christ both in terms of the Babe in the manger and in terms of One who has to do with the forces of nature. Our tendency in the modern world has been to divorce Christ and the natural world, with the result that greed, superstition and fatalism govern our relationship to the Chreation. Steimle sees the story of the stilling of the storm as a dramatic statement of Christ's lordship over powers that for us are often "chaotic" and "inscrutable." He is "not simply one of us, bewildered victim of wind and sea and the forces of nature," but, as the prologue to the Fourth Gospel makes clear, He is somehow linked with these forces. The implications of this are crucially important:

You see what this means: that the God of creation, the God of the natural world around us, is not one thing, an impersonal force or power that is as inscrutable and cold and heartless as fate, while Christ who is warm, personal, the very embodiment of love is another. They are one and the same. It means that the God of sunset and hurricane and snowflake and the immensities of space is the same God who comes down to earth in the peasant child in a Bethlehem stable.⁶¹

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 50.

This unity between the God of creation and the God of redemption does not remove mystery from the face of the universe. There remains much that bewilders us and drives us to distraction. But the love disclosed to us in the stable and at the cross assures us that "the God behind this mystery is not an impersonal fate, mocking our puny efforts to make sense of it all, but rather that his name is Father."⁶²

d. Homecoming. The image of "homecoming" stands in antiphonal relationship to that of "exile." Steimle, as we have seen, deals in a number of ways with the fact that in this world our condition is that of estrangement and alienation, or, as a text from the letter to the Hebrews phrases it, we are "strangers and exiles."

In his sermon on that text, Steimle offers not the abrogation of our transient status in this world but rather a shift in its position in our lives. Outside faith, the sense of exile and estrangement governs the center of life, despite all our frantic efforts to pretend that we are at home and secure. Faith consists of the simple acceptance of the fact that this world offers us no ultimate resting place; indeed, faith removes the need for it, because it has already found a more fundamental "citizenship" and "homeland" in the love of God. Then, paradoxically, even this world begins to lose some of its aspect of "foreignness":

Only as we come to know that this earth is not our true home can we ever find ourselves truly at home here. And it is out of this apparent contradiction, this tension that the Christian grows and

⁶²Ibid., p. 52.

develops: no longer the aching homesickness or the frantic efforts to transform an inn into a permanent residence. The estrangement and sense of exile are transferred from the center of life to the peripheral and the passing as man is at home in this lovely, fascinating, and often tragic world because he knows where his true home lies.⁶³

But even with this paradoxical assurance in his heart, man is never more than a transient in this world. Death is the constant sign over his life that here he has "no continuing city." It is a great "No" that stands at the end of every way.

Steimle declares, as an antiphon to this "No," the "Yes" of Easter. The Resurrection is the sign that "God's Yes will not abide life's No or death's No."⁶⁴ It is the assurance that "the final horizon" which circumscribes our lives has been overcome, not in the sense that it is eliminated, but in the sense that the God who loves and forgives awaits us there:

The Christian hope says no more than that as I am utterly and completely dependent on God now for life and breath, so also at the hour of death. There is nothing in me that death can ultimately shatter. But as I trust him now, so will I trust him then. I have no claim on him then, no immortal soul that demands of him that death cannot touch my innermost being. But I am given the hope of resurrection from the grave if I trust him now and trust him then, which simply means that death is not the last word in the vocabulary of life.⁶⁵

C. AN APPRAISAL OF HOFFMANN AND STEIMLE AS PREACHERS OF GOSPEL

At the close of Chapter III, we listed five criteria for preaching Gospel today. They were derived from our sketch of Luther's

⁶³Ibid., p. 178. ⁶⁴Ibid., p. 90. ⁶⁵Ibid., pp. 18-19.

understanding of Gospel and from selected examples of contemporary interpretation of Gospel. In this chapter, we have looked at samplings of the ways in which Hoffmann and Steimle articulate the Gospel. We will now turn again to the five criteria from Chapter III and offer an estimate of how adequately Hoffmann and Steimle fulfill each of them in their preaching.

1. The offer of forgiveness will be an essential dimension of the preaching of Gospel today.

Both men see the offer of forgiveness as an essential dimension of the Gospel, but there is an obvious difference in the proportion that dimension assumes in their preaching. For Hoffmann, forgiveness or justification is the dominant mode in which the Gospel is proclaimed. Indeed, there is a concern on his part to introduce a declaration about sin and forgiveness into nearly every sermon. We have noted how, even when he is dealing with some aspect of the human condition other than guilt (e.g., alienation, despair, meaninglessness, death), he eventually transposes the antiphonal response of the Gospel into the key of forgiveness. He is determined to drive home the point that sin is the ill behind every ill and, therefore, forgiveness is the "cure" behind every "cure."

One result of this drive to cast the Gospel so predominantly in the mold of forgiveness is a sense of jaggedness in the development of some of the sermons. There are abrupt transitions from some other mode of interpreting Gospel to the mode of forgiveness. We noted, for

example, how in one sermon a suggestion as to the "multidimensional" healing power of the Gospel is left undeveloped;⁶⁶ the surrounding material is preoccupied with the matter of forgiveness. Hoffmann's strength is that he never lets us escape from the necessity to confront ourselves as persons who must bear responsibility and, therefore, guilt for the broken condition of our lives. His weakness is that he does not take seriously enough the fact that modern man often does not begin with guilt as a category of self-understanding and, therefore, is not ready to hear the Gospel immediately as forgiveness.

Steimle's balance in the proclamation of Gospel is the opposite of Hoffmann's. He does not neglect the offer of forgiveness, just as he does not neglect the preaching of Law as judgment. But he is not compelled to introduce these themes in sermons in which the focus of his message is upon other aspects of man's life. There are occasional sermons (e.g., "God's Judgments and Ours," "Arise and Walk," "A Bad Bargain") in which the Gospel as forgiveness receives exclusive attention, but there are many sermons (e.g., "The Peril of Ordinary Days," "When God Is Deaf," "Is God As Good As Jesus") in which he finds it possible to deal single-mindedly with an aspect of the human condition other than guilt and a dimension of Gospel other than forgiveness. Steimle's proportions seem more appropriate to the characteristic ways in which men read their condition today. Likewise, his finer calibration of the motif of Gospel he accents with the particular human

⁶⁶Cf. p.148 above.

problem he has exposed by the Law permits each sermon to preserve an inner integrity which Hoffmann's mixing of modes sometimes damages.

2. The Gospel as antiphon to existence will be lifted to new prominence in preaching today.

Our assessment of Hoffmann and Steimle in this regard has been anticipated in the paragraphs just above. The articulation of Gospel in modes other than forgiveness is a minor theme in Hoffmann's preaching. This fact corresponds directly to his relatively limited use of the Law as "mirror of existence." He stands squarely in the guilt/forgiveness axis of preaching Law and Gospel, and, in this sense, is in direct continuity with what we have seen to be the primary mode of interpreting these categories in Luther. Though he gives some attention to the extra-judgment themes of Law and the extra-forgiveness themes of Gospel, his sermons reveal that he is not as open as Steimle to incorporating contemporary emphases in the interpretation of Law and Gospel into his preaching. His palette has a more limited range of colors than Steimle's, and, to this degree the appeal of his preaching will tend to be limited to those who are able to understand their condition primarily in terms of guilt.

For Steimle, on the other hand, the preaching of Gospel as "antiphon to existence" is dominant. The terms in which he analyzes the human condition are much less apt to be controlled by the categories of sin and guilt. Though theologically he sees sin to lie at the root of man's predicament (cf. "Arise and Walk"), he appears to

believe that man can often be addressed homiletically more effectively by describing his condition in other terms. Having done this, he is capable of making a response from the Gospel which is sensitive and appropriate to the contours of man's existence as he has described them. If, for example, he has talked about the "darkness" of suffering, he responds, not in terms of forgiveness or justification, but in terms of God's participation with us in our need. In this sense, his preaching is a homiletical counterpart of Tillich's "answering theology" to a degree not true for Hoffmann. Hoffmann can make appropriate response to the extra-guilt aspects of human need, but he has a tendency to revert in rather arbitrary fashion to the theme of forgiveness.

Both Hoffmann and Steimle avoid a simplistic announcement of the Gospel in the face of the harsh realities of existence. They preserve the "in the midst of" character of the Gospel as antiphon, offering no false hope that the introduction of its reality into human affairs will resolve all tensions or eliminate all pain. Hoffmann gives relatively less attention to this theme than Steimle, but his point of view is summarized in a sentence from "Is God Outvoted?": "Amid the pain and destruction of the world God is at work."⁶⁷ Steimle devotes proportionately more attention to this theme and goes to greater length to make plain that it is precisely within the brokenness and ambiguity of life that we hear the Word of promise and hope. A passage in "Cross and Glory" is characteristic:

⁶⁷Oswald Hoffmann, "Is God Outvoted?" p. 6.

But this much is clear. If glory and cross are held together as they are in the New Testament, then whenever--despite mixed motives, despite the risks and tangled web of good and evil--whenever there is suffering for others, concern for the dispossessed and unlovely, living primarily for the good of others, there does the 'glory of God,' his very presence, shine through--however brokenly--in the baffling mishmash of life around us.⁶⁸

3. The preaching of Gospel will find its focus in the person and work of Jesus.

Here both men are in direct continuity with Luther's insistence that men cannot find a gracious God by way of their own speculations but must turn to His self-disclosure in the person of Jesus Christ. In fact, each man has a sermon in which one can hear the echoes of Luther's own words: ". . . you must run directly to the manger and the mother's womb."⁶⁹ In an Epiphany sermon, Hoffmann asks, "Where do we look for grace?", and answers, "To a manger in a little town in a far away country. . . ."⁷⁰ Likewise, in an Epiphany sermon, Steimle tells us that "God, the creator of all this incredible vastness which we call the universe, and Christ, the one who came as a peasant Jewish child and dies at the hands of men like you and me, are one and the same."⁷¹

⁶⁸Steimle, Disturbed By Joy, p. 70.

⁶⁹Cf. p. 97 above.

⁷⁰Cf. p. 135 above.

⁷¹Steimle, Disturbed By Joy, p. 53.

The sentence just quoted from Steimle appears in a sermon in which he proclaims the cosmic Lordship of Christ as "antiphon" to our experience of the fateful and the inscrutable in the natural world. It is illustrative of a strange fact which begins to become clear in the study of his sermons: he is most explicit about the place of Jesus in God's economy when articulating the Gospel as "antiphon to existence" and most reticent about the place of Jesus when interpreting it as forgiveness. We noted in our examination of his preaching of forgiveness this reluctance to "name the Name" even when, in one sermon, he speaks of the Cross.⁷² The references to the person of Christ are more direct in a sermon on Matthew 11:28-30, with its report of Jesus' invitation, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden. . . ," but Steimle finds it possible to speak of forgiveness exclusively in terms of "God's acceptance" of us or with only indirect reference to Jesus. When the work of Christ is brought to our attention, it is in terms of His revealing or acting out God's accepting love, not in terms of ransom, substitution or propitiation.

On the other hand, when Steimle preaches Gospel in terms other than forgiveness, the christocentricity of his message is apt to be more explicit. Christ is the One in whom God "stepped down" to reveal the "fullness of His love."⁷³ He is the One who gives "substance" to

⁷²Cf. p. 143 above.

⁷³Steimle, Are You Looking for God? p. 150.

our hope by what God has done and continues to do for us through Him.⁷⁴ He is the point of entry into our world for "the relentless attack of grace."⁷⁵ Through His death "the love that is at the very heart of God is laid perfectly bare and plain."⁷⁶ His resurrection is "God's Yes" spoken against the No which shadows our existence.⁷⁷

Even when he preaches the Gospel as antiphon, however, Steimle is not always as verbally explicit in his proclamation of Christ as Hoffmann. There is not a single sermon in the Hoffmann collection in which Jesus is not named explicitly and repeatedly, almost always with a full range of christological titles (e.g., Christ, Lord, Son of God, Savior), with frequent references to His Cross and resurrection and with ample attention to His work as redeemer from sin.

Thus, if one were to measure the christocentricity of these two preachers by means of a totalization of their explicit references to Jesus, Hoffmann would unquestionably emerge the victor. But this is not an adequate test. The grace which was enacted in the Incarnation is present elsewhere in nature and history, and Steimle shows a capacity to articulate its operations in terms of God's dealings with Israel, the manifestations of His goodness and glory in the created orders, and the glimpses of self-giving love we see in ordinary human

⁷⁴Steimle, Disturbed By Joy, p. 23.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 63.

⁷⁶Steimle, Are You Looking for God? p. 127.

⁷⁷Steimle, Disturbed By Joy, p. 90.

relationships to a degree that goes beyond Hoffmann's more exclusive attention to that grace operative in Christ. Steimle's search for "non-religious" analogies for grace (about which we will speak below) probably accounts for the absence of explicit christological material in connection with some of his preaching of forgiveness. There are points in his sermons where more explicit reference to Jesus as the embodiment of grace would give a clearer focus to the Gospel, yet his more allusive style, with its lack of any compulsiveness with regard to the use of the classic language of christology, is far more attuned to today's secular man than Hoffmann's repetitions of the traditional christological vocabulary.

4. The preacher of Gospel today will search for an idiom which is intelligible to contemporary man.

The passages already quoted from Hoffmann's sermons reveal his heavy dependence upon the language of traditional piety in articulating the Gospel. His preaching is replete with such phrases as "in Christ there is forgiveness," "Christ died for the sins of all," or, "Jesus Christ paid the price." Sometimes the language of piety slides off into the language of dogma, and the Gospel is clothed in a highly technical theological vocabulary. One passage will be sufficient to recall his style:

But there is righteousness in Jesus Christ by the goodness and grace of God. All are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ, whom God set forth to be a substitutionary sacrifice through faith in His atoning blood. In Christ, God puts men right with Himself, declares men

righteous, makes men righteous, that He might show Himself to be a just God, able to pass judgment upon men everywhere and at the same time justifying men everywhere through faith in Jesus Christ.⁷⁸

If Hoffmann's target is the man who stands outside the circle of Christian faith, it is clear that such a vocabulary as this will simply be unintelligible to him. There are passages in which Hoffmann speaks in more human terms of what God has done in Christ,⁷⁹ but too often he is content with phrases drawn from the thought-world of earlier centuries, left in untranslated form. His language is redolent with words and images borrowed directly from Luther and the biblical witness before him, but here Hoffmann's very fidelity to the past is a form of infidelity. By failing to struggle, as Luther did, to articulate the Gospel in terms native to his own generation, he has inhibited the communication of the same Gospel for all except the few of his hearers to whom the language of the Sixteenth Century still resonates with meaning. Words which once were carriers of a message are now baffles against its being heard.

Here Steimle's preaching of Gospel stands in striking contrast to Hoffmann's. At one level, the difference is simply a matter of vocabulary. Steimle seems determined to avoid at all costs the

⁷⁸Hoffmann, "The Green and the Golden," p. 3.

⁷⁹E.g., Jesus as the One who "ranged Himself alongside all us sinners. . . ." (Hoffmann, "Stuck on Yourself," p. 5); Jesus as "the Man for us all. . . ." (Oswald Hoffmann, "The End Is the Beginning," p. 2); Jesus as "a real man with a big heart, so big that it includes everyone, even you." (Hoffmann, "Which Is Easier?" p. 3.)

language which traditional piety has attached especially to the Gospel as forgiveness. One looks in vain for the stock phrases we have found in Hoffmann or for lapses into the technical language of theology. In fact, in one sermon Steimle expressly deplores the reduction of wonder that can occur when a formula like "justification by faith" is seen as a doctrine to which men must assent rather than as the transcript of an "unsearchable" mystery:

Speaking for my own tradition, how often we Lutherans--so unlike Luther--have torn away the mystery and made of the miracle of 'justification by grace through faith' little more than a denominational tag, trampled on the wonder of it in dogmatic text books, flaunted it in the faces of Christian brothers as a polemical weapon, gagged and starved the life--and the mystery of God--out of it.⁸⁰

Steimle's preference when preaching forgiveness--and this is the second level at which he differs from Hoffmann--is to speak analogically. He knows that the problem of communicating the Gospel today goes beyond the mere translation of archaic language into contemporary phrases. A way must also be found to acquaint men with the dynamics of forgiveness. Hoffmann often appears to be content with the "herald" image of the preacher: he simply announces the offer of forgiveness and exhorts the listener to accept it. Steimle, on the other hand, sees his role as also that of "interpreter": the listener must be led into an understanding of the operations of grace. To serve that end, he employs analogies drawn from the ordinary round of experience, e.g., the carefree child confident in the love of his

⁸⁰Steimle, Disturbed By Joy, pp. 40-41.

parents,⁸¹ the engaged couple contributing zest to each other's lives.⁸² Steimle has been influenced, as we have seen, by Tillich's translation of "justification by faith" into "accepting the fact that we are accepted." This, too, is analogical language. It draws upon the familiar world of human relationships--specifically, in Tillich's case, the therapeutic relationship--to illumine the meaning of grace and faith.

Thus, Steimle, while standing farther than Hoffmann from Luther with regard to language, appears to be closer to Luther's own struggle to cast the message of the Gospel in a form accessible to his own generation.

5. The Gospel will be brought to the hearer as directly and personally as possible.

All preaching, of course, is personal exchange, but we have seen Luther's particular insistence that the Gospel be so proclaimed that every hearer will be able to say it is "for me." Both Hoffmann (except in passages strongly dominated by the verbiage of technical theology) and Steimle give evidence of taking seriously this understanding of the Gospel as personal address. In spite of the anonymous character of their mass radio audiences, they appear to retain a lively awareness that they are not preaching in a general way "to whom

⁸¹Steimle, Are You Looking for God? pp. 37-38.

⁸²Ibid., p. 61.

it may concern" but to actual persons.

This is, in part, a matter of syntax. H. H. Farmer has underscored the importance of pronounal choice in the sentences of the sermon by pointing to the appropriateness of the second person for "I - thou" communication.⁸³ Hoffmann, especially, makes liberal use of the direct "you" form of address in his preaching of grace. Two samples illustrate a style that recurs throughout the sermons:

He says: I fix My eye upon you. I do not reject you because you have sinned against Me, nor do I put you away because you have displeased Me.⁸⁴

There is forgiveness for you in Jesus Christ. There is healing for you in Jesus Christ. It is the gift of God to you. It comes to you by His grace. His undeserved love. It is all yours through Jesus Christ.⁸⁵

Steimle likewise employs on occasion the "you" mode of address in preaching Gospel, though his style is apt to be less ruggedly direct than Hoffmann's:

This is what Christ offers you--if you will toss aside your cautious prudence for a moment, get down on the floor on your hands and knees and look up at life through the eyes of a child; then you will be 'born again,' as the Bible has it, and see life's infinite capacity for wonder and surprise--and the extravagant kindness which is at the heart of God!⁸⁶

Just as frequently Steimle (and to a lesser extent Hoffmann) achieves directness of contact by means of a device we noted in his

⁸³Cf. Chapter III, footnote #91, p. 130.

⁸⁴Oswald Hoffmann, "How to Amount to Something," p. 5.

⁸⁵Hoffmann, "Healing In Christ: You and God," p. 5.

⁸⁶Steimle, Are You Looking for God? p. 154.

preaching of Law--the "montage" effect.⁸⁷ Through a series of quick images of people in a variety of concrete settings, Steimle provides the listener with points of entry into the sermon. The setting may not be identical with that of the listener, but he will hopefully glimpse a situation analogous to his own and thus sense that the message proclaimed is intended for him.

⁸⁷E.g., in his portrayal of "ordinariness" quoted on p. 77.

CHAPTER V

THE CALL TO OBEDIENCE

Lutheranism has frequently been rebuked for aborting the Christian message at the point of "justification by faith." About "sanctification" and the whole field of ethics, personal and social, it has had--so runs the critique--too little to say. This critique reached its crescendo during the Hitler era in Germany when Barth and others charged the resurgent barbarism of the Nazi movement to the social quietism of the German citizenry, a quietism which they traced in turn to the legacy of Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms.¹ Whatever Luther's intentions, the practical outcome among his spiritual heirs was the belief that God is concerned only with the "spiritual" kingdom on His "right hand," whereas the "worldly" kingdoms of political and economic life on His "left hand" are free to operate autonomously.

If Lutheran theology is, in fact, vulnerable at this point, the weakness is bound to be reflected in Lutheran homiletics. Lutheran preachers have properly and characteristically been warned of the "danger" that we may neglect the radical biblical message of Christianity and teach a moral and religious idealism alone as religion, a way of life sufficient in itself, possible for all men and

¹Cf. Karl Barth, "First Letter to the French Protestants," in his This Christian Cause (New York: Macmillan, 1941), p. 11.

profitable for all."² It is not as common to hear a warning against the neglect to preach about the "style of life" which the Christian man, as "a new creation," is to manifest in the world.³

At the heart of this problem lies the issue of the tertius usus legis. Did Luther teach a so-called "third use of the Law," alongside its political and theological uses? Put another way, "What continuing significance, if any, does the Law have in the life of the man who has been justified by faith?" The way in which a man answers such a question will decisively influence the manner in which he attends to the question of "ethics" in his preaching, whether and how his sermons include "the call to obedience."

In an effort to reach clarity on this matter, we will first examine material from Luther himself. Next we will review three significant contemporary responses to the question of the place of Law in the believer's life. Finally, we will draw from our discussion a set of criteria for preaching "the call to obedience" today.

² Henry Grady Davis, Design for Preaching (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), p. 125.

³ An exception is Thielicke, "The theological thinking of the Protestant churches has been largely confined to this message of the new status of the heart before God. But it has not considered (or too little considered) that the heart controls an entire circulatory system and that it must also supply blood to the extremities." Helmut Thielicke, The Trouble With the Church (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 12.

A. LUTHER AND THE TERTIUS USUS LEGIS

The question as to whether the category tertius usus legis is appropriate to Lutheran theology is still being vigorously debated.⁴ It is clear that Melanchthon employed the term; in fact its use in Lutheran circles probably originates with him. The Loci Communes (1555) contains a section entitled "Of a Threefold Use of the Law"⁵ in which, after reviewing the political and theological uses, Melanchthon states that the third use has to do with "those saints who are now believers," and so functions in them that they "may know and have a testimony of the works which please God."⁶ The saints are free from the Law in the sense that it no longer condemns them, but knowledge of God's "eternal and unchangeable law" is to be maintained in the church to the end that "men may have divine testimony of what is right and of what sin is."⁷ Here Melanchthon approaches the classic Reformed position which has consistently posited a "third use" of the Law. Indeed, Calvin designated this "third use" the "principle" use and described its function as that of instructing the

⁴See, for example, such studies as: Gerhard Ebeling, "On the Doctrine of the Tripex Usus Legis in the Theology of the Reformation" and "Reflexions on the Doctrine of the Law" in his Word and Faith (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960); Paul Althaus, The Divine Command (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966); Werner Elert, Law and Gospel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967); Helmuth Thielicke, Theological Ethics (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), I, Chs. 5-8; Wilfried Joest, Gesetz und Freiheit (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961).

⁵Phillip Melanchthon, On Christian Doctrine: Loci Communes (1555) (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 122-129.

⁶Ibid., p. 127.

⁷Ibid.

saints with regard to "the nature of the Lord's will to which they aspire" and exhorting them toward its fulfillment.⁸

Among the Lutheran confessional writings, the earlier Augsburg Confession (1530) and Smalcald Articles (1537) make no mention of a tertius usus legis, whereas the later Formula of Concord (1577) has a separate section devoted to that subject. It states that the Law applies to men "after they are regenerate," because the flesh still clings to them and they therefore need "a fixed rule, according to which they should regulate and direct their whole life."⁹ The Formula immediately notes, however, that "a discussion has occurred between some few theologians" over this very point.

Luther scholarship seems now ready to assert that Luther himself did not employ the term tertius usus legis. Werner Elbert has prepared systematic evidence which points to the probability that the occurrence of this phrase at the close of "The Second Disputation against The Antinomians" represents a later insertion, borrowed directly from Melanchthon's Loci.¹⁰

Of much more moment than the question whether Lutheran theology espouses the formulation "third use of the Law" is the question whether, whatever the vocabulary, the whole reality of Law has, in the Lutheran tradition, any continuing significance for the believer. One

⁸ Jean Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), I, 360.

⁹ Henry Eyster Jacobs (ed.), The Book of Concord (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Publication House, 1911), p. 508.

¹⁰ Elert, op. cit., p. 38-39; cf. also Ebeling, op. cit., pp. 62-78.

could certainly cite passages from Luther in which Christ is declared so emphatically to be the "end of the Law" that its function in the life of the Christian seems to have ceased.¹¹ Furthermore, it would appear that the Christian man, living out of the impulse of faith, produces good works spontaneously; he has "no need of a teacher of good works, but he does whatever the occasion calls for, and all is well done."¹² His obedience to God is no longer external and constrained but is as natural a product of the presence of the Spirit within as is the "good fruit" which is produced by a healthy tree. He can no more fail to exhibit a good life than a rock lying in the sun can fail to grow warm. Luther also uses the analogy of the mutual service of a husband and wife in a good marriage. They do for each other what is needful without any instruction: "Confidence alone teaches them all this, and even more than is necessary."¹³ Such language, pointing to a virtual "automatism of works,"¹⁴ seems to imply that to the Christian the Law no longer need be preached.

¹¹"If a Christian is properly defined and accurately, therefore, he is a child of grace and of the forgiveness of sins. He has no Law at all, but he is above the Law, sin, death, and hell." Martin Luther, "Lectures on Galatians" (1535), in his Works (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959-), XXVI, 26.

¹²Martin Luther, "Treatise on Good Works" (1520), in Ibid., XLIV, 26.

¹³Ibid., XLIV, 26-27.

¹⁴Thielicke, Theological Ethics, I, 57.

A closer reading of Luther, however, makes it clear that such a conclusion is unwarranted. In the first place, the Christian, along with all men, is still subject to the Law in its "civil use." As long as he is in this world, he cannot escape the orders of state, economy, family and institutional church, and, as a participant in them, he is subject to the divine mandate which prescribes their rightful patterns. The secular responsibilities of the justified man are never abrogated. In fact, he will be the more diligent in their fulfillment, because he has been supplied with a new and powerful motive. He now knows that the Author of the Law is likewise the Father in heaven who daily forgives him all his sins; therefore, he will perform his daily duties with a freedom and joy impossible for the man to whom the Law's Author remains anonymous.¹⁵ On the surface, the Christian man's behavior will look very little different from that of any other socially responsible person:

The works of a Christian are cheap in appearance: He does his duty according to his calling; he rules the commonwealth, he runs the household, he tills the fields, he helps, supports, and serves his neighbor.¹⁶

But these absolutely secular and undistinguished appearing works are "good and acceptable to God when they are done in faith, a joyful spirit, obedience, and gratitude toward God."¹⁷

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 141.

¹⁶ Luther, "Lectures on Galatians" (1535), in his Works, XXVI, 376.

¹⁷ Ibid.

It must be clear, however, that this loving obedience contributes nothing to justification. In the inner realm of the conscience, the Gospel reigns and speaks only of the forgiveness of sins. It is in the public realm of society, where the body and its members must still be "busy on earth," that the Law has the right to speak. Here, "let nothing be known about the Gospel, conscience, grace, the forgiveness of sins, heavenly righteousness, or Christ Himself."¹⁸ In this realm, the voice of Moses must be heard, laying upon the body the burdens requisite to a man's station. "Thus the Law remains in the valley with the ass, and the Gospel remains with Isaac on the mountain."¹⁹

However, the Law has continuing significance for the Christian not only in its "civil use" but also in its "theological use." This is so because the Christian man is always gerecht und Sunder zugleich--at the same time justified and sinner. In opposition to the very real working of the Spirit in his heart, the flesh--"that powerful jackass"-- still clings to him and stubbornly persists in bringing forth "lust, greed, ambition, pride, . . . ignorance and contempt of God, impatience, grumbling, and wrath against God because He obstructs our plans and efforts"²⁰ Therefore, the Christian, so long as he lives on this earth, never ceases to have to do with the accusations of the Law. It continues to threaten him with God's wrath, so that the fear of God must always be present in a Christian's heart,

¹⁸Ibid., XXVI, 116. ¹⁹Ibid., XXVI, 117. ²⁰Ibid., XXVI, 342.

"because sin is always present." This fact is the basis for Luther's description of the Christian life in the Large Catechism as "nothing else than a daily baptism, once begun and ever to be continued."²¹ Baptism signifies the drowning of the old Adam and the rising to life of the new man in Christ. But with each new day, the old Adam rears his head again and must once more be put to death. The Law, with its power to accuse and condemn, is his executioner.

Yet, in the Christian, this accusatory function of the Law is mitigated. It threatens a man who has already experienced "the first fruits of the Spirit." He knows, in addition to the threats of his Judge, the comforting voice of His Savior, whose yoke is easy. The Law is the "gauze in the wound" to keep it from closing over before it has fully healed. Therefore, the Christian will not despair, as Judas did, when the Law threatens him, but will accept its rebukes as the discipline which leads to grace. In summary:

So long as the flesh remains, there remains the Law, the custodian who continually terrifies and distresses the conscience with his demonstrations of sin and his threats of death. But it is always encouraged by the daily coming of Christ.²²

But the further question must be asked if Luther, whether he speaks of a tertius usus legis or not, has anything positive to say about the ethical content of the life of the man who is justified by faith. Is there a legitimate place in teaching and preaching for

²¹Jacobs, op. cit., p. 474.

²²Luther, "Lectures on Galatians" (1535), in his Works, XXVI, 349.

instruction in the actual lineaments of the good life and exhortation toward its fulfillment? Here the answer is unquestionably, "Yes."

In the "Lecture on Galatians" (1535), for example, in which Luther has laid out, in his comments on chapter 1-5:12, the message of justification by faith as clearly and exhaustively as possible, he begins his exposition of 5:13ff. with the following statement:

Now there follow exhortations and commandments about good morals. For the apostle makes it a habit, after the teaching of faith and the instruction of consciences, to introduce some commandments about morals, by which he exhorts the believers to practice the duties of godliness toward one another. . . . Thus the world has no right to accuse Christians of undermining good morals or of disturbing public peace and respectability; for they teach morals and all the virtues better than any philosophers or teachers, because they add faith.²³

There follows then an insistence that, though the conscience has been freed by Christ from the curse of the Law, the body is still bound by the commandment to love. Through Christ, the Christian is, in his conscience, "a Lord over the Law," but he is nevertheless subject to "this external obligation . . . on his body, that through love he should serve his neighbor."²⁴ This commandment continues in force for him "as long as human nature remains."²⁵ His salvation does not depend upon his fulfilling it, for this he can never do. Only faith can justify, but "faith is not idle, even though love is tiny and weak."²⁶ The commandment to love encourages us to take sides with

²³Ibid., XXVII, 47.

²⁴Ibid., XXVII, 51.

²⁵Ibid., XXVII, 58.

²⁶Ibid., XXVII, 68.

the Spirit in the conflict between flesh and Spirit which rages within us until death.²⁷

Luther frequently portrays this neighbor-love which the Christian is under obligation to manifest in terms of the love which has been shown us in Christ. The Christian's love is a reflexive love, in that it acts out on earth the same pattern of love which has come down from heaven. The Christian man deals with his neighbor as he has been dealt with by God through Christ:

Hence, as our heavenly Father has in Christ freely come to our aid, we also ought freely to help our neighbor through our body and its works, and each one should become as it were a Christ to the other that we may be Christs to one another and Christ be the same in all, that is, that we may be truly Christians.²⁸

For the most part, the Christian will perform the works of love in the ordinary sphere of his calling within the orders of creation. He will discover the obligations of neighborliness pressing upon him precisely as he fulfills the duties incumbent upon him in the "station" God has assigned him in this world, whether as parent or child, husband or wife, prince or peasant, artisan or farmer: "Let each do his duty in that way of life into which God has called him."²⁹ Faith active in love expresses itself in such unspectacular feats as,

²⁷Ibid., XXVII, 65-66.

²⁸Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian" (1520), in his Selections from His Writings (Garden City: Doubleday, 1961), p. 76.

²⁹Luther, "Lectures on Galatians" (1535), in his Works, XXVII, 62.

. . . teaching the erring; comforting the afflicted; encouraging the weak; helping the neighbor in whatever way one can; bearing with his rude manners and impoliteness; putting up with annoyances, labors, and the ingratitude and contempt of men in both church and state; obeying the magistrates; treating one's parents with respect; being patient in the home with a cranky wife and an unmanageable family and the like.³⁰

It is not only, however, in his more formal writings that Luther devotes attention to the ethical consequences of justification; his own preaching sounds "the call to obedience." He finds, for example, in the story of the miracle at Cana an occasion for affirming the institution of marriage and for assuring Christians that they can enter freely and joyfully into the merry-making which was part of the German wedding celebration. At the same time, he decries carousing, gluttony and extravagance, and goes so far as to offer a "rule of thumb" as to what "moderation" in dress, food and drink might mean for the various classes of the German social order.³¹

Though the burden of Luther's message in a sermon-- whatever the text--is invariably "justification by faith," it is not uncommon for him to add to this first and primary point a secondary one

³⁰Ibid., XXVII, 56.

³¹"What then is moderation? Reason should teach that, and cite examples from other countries and cities where such pomp and excesses are unknown. But to give my opinion, I would say a farmer is well adorned if for his wedding he have clothes twice as fine as he daily wears at his work; a burgher likewise; and a nobleman, if he have garments twice as costly as a townsman; a count twice as costly as a nobleman; a duke, twice as costly as a count, and so in due order. In like manner food and drink and the entertainment of guests should be governed by their social position, and the purpose of the table should be pleasure not debauchery." Martin Luther, "Church Postil," in his Works (Minneapolis: Lutherans in All Lands, 1906), XI, 59.

expounding the obligations of love. Thus, for example, the account in John's Gospel of Thomas' encounter with the Risen Lord becomes the occasion for a sermon with two points: I. Of True Godliness; of the Law and Faith; II. Of Love to Your Neighbor. The latter point grows out of Christ's words to the apostles, "As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you." We are to do all that is possible on behalf of our neighbor in his need, because this is the way Christ has dealt with us. Luther's summary sentence for the sermon is: "Through faith we belong above to God: Through love below to our neighbor."³² In a similar way, Luther finds in the story of the cleansing of the leper the double lesson of faith and love. The leper's confidence in approaching Christ is an example of and for faith; Christ's "pure grace" in stooping to the leper's need is an example of true love for the neighbor. Thus, it is shown how "faith makes of us lords, and love makes of us servants."³³

Thus, however the question of the tertius usus legis is finally settled, Luther clearly gives attention to the quality of life which faith produces. He never fails to make clear that the works of love are the evidences, or consequences, of justification and not its cause. He can even speak as if the new man in Christ will produce such works spontaneously, without need of commands. Yet, because he views man so realistically as both iustus et peccator, he recognizes the need for something like "the call to obedience" to

³²Ibid., XI, 377.

³³Ibid., XI, 73.

incite the Christian to side with the Spirit in its continual struggle against the flesh:

This is why faithful preachers must exert themselves as much in urging a love that is unfeigned or in urging truly good works as in teaching true faith. Therefore let no one think that he knows this commandment, 'You shall love your neighbor,' perfectly. It is very short and so far as its words are concerned, it is very easy. But show me the preachers and hearers who truly practice and produce it in their teaching and living. I see both groups taking it easy! Thus the words, 'Through love be servants of one another' and 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself' are eternal words, which no one can adequately ponder, teach, and practice.³⁴

B. THE CONTEMPORARY DISCUSSION

We will turn now to an examination of certain efforts in contemporary theology to come to terms with the issues raised by the question of the tertius usus legis. The first two positions to which we will refer have been stated by Lutheran theologians and represent, in the first case, a positive answer to the question of the tertius usus legis, and, in the second case, a negative answer. The third position is that of C. H. Dodd and is dealt with here because of the relevance to the Law-Gospel discussion of his familiar kerygma-didache bifurcation of the Christian message and, in particular, because of the bearing of his definition of didache upon the question of the continuing significance of the Law for the believer.

³⁴Luther, "Lectures on Galatians" (1535), in his Works, XXVII, 54.

1. The Law as "Loving Reminder": Helmut Thielicke.

Helmut Thielicke stands almost alone among contemporary interpreters of Luther in his contention that it is possible to speak of a tertius usus legis and remain faithful to Luther. Though he agrees with Elert's conclusion that the explicit reference to this "use" of the Law in Luther's "Second Disputation against the Antinomians" is a later insertion from Melancthon, he argues that Elert's "charge of 'blatant falsification' is exaggerated."³⁵ Luther's positive position with regard to a tertius usus legis, he contends, is more broadly based than this single questionable reference. He sees such a doctrine as true to Luther's clear "intention," even if it does not echo his actual language. Thielicke holds that Luther's reserve in speaking about the continuing significance of the Law for the believer is, in large measure, due to the fact that he was usually writing in reaction against the Roman Catholic "nomistic doctrine of salvation."³⁶

Thielicke is struck by the fact that in both the New Testament and the Reformation writings the indicative and the imperative stand side by side. The Christian man is something--a new man, a new creation, a justified sinner. To the degree that he can be described in indicative terms, it follows that he will manifest spontaneously the new life to which he is called. His obedience will be in the nature

³⁵Thielicke, Theological Ethics, I, 134; cf. also p. 55.

³⁶Ibid., I, 133.

of "good fruits"; i.e., it will take place with the automatism of the processes of nature, without need of external commandments.³⁷ Out of the new relationship with God established in justification, there comes "a spontaneous movement of the ego" in the direction of good works, a movement which is "devoid of Law and imperative."³⁸

Yet, the biblical and Reformation writings speak just as emphatically to the believer in the imperative mode. The new man is sometimes addressed as though his new life were not a "gift," unfolding as naturally as a flower, but as though it were a "task" in which he must invest his own cooperative energies.³⁹ Thieliicke sees these apparently contradictory ways of describing the Christian man as equally essential. When either is emphasized one-sidedly man's real relationship with God is distorted. Over-emphasis on the imperative undercuts the primacy of grace in the Christian life, and the door is opened to "works-righteousness." Over-emphasis on the indicative places the evidences of grace solely in the experiences of the believer, so that the ground of his assurance ceases to be extra nous in Christ.⁴⁰

Gospel and Law, demand and gift must be continuing realities in the life of the Christian because of what might be called the "quantitatively incomplete" nature of justification. Thieliicke distinguishes between the "qualitative" aspect of justification, in which

³⁷Ibid., I, 37f.

³⁸Ibid., I, 64.

³⁹Ibid., I, 69-73.

⁴⁰Ibid., I, 82.

man's full acceptance with God is declared without condition or reservation, and the "quantitative" aspect, in which, in the arena of actual life, I must "express in my decisions this fact which has taken place for me."⁴¹ Qualitatively, my justification can in no sense be a matter of "degrees"; quantitatively, however, there must be "an advancing or progressing" in which the reality of justification is given ever widening expression in the concrete actualities of life. In brief, "we are redeemed children of God, but there are unredeemed areas in us."⁴²

It is to this man whose justification is qualitatively secure but quantitatively incomplete that Thielicke sees the Law continuing to apply. He is freed from the Law in the sense that its "dominion and curse" no longer hang over his life, but he now finds himself under what St. Paul calls "the law of Christ." (I Cor. 9:21). Its content, in terms of its delineation of the will of God, is no different than before justification, but now a man's relation to it has radically changed. Insofar as he is "in Christ," he no longer confronts the Law as a rebel but as "the one who in free love actually wills what the Father wills."⁴³

Thus, against Elert, Thielicke denies a solely accusatory function to the Law. In the life of the justified man, it makes its presence felt also as "loving reminder."⁴⁴ In Thielicke's imagery, it no

⁴¹Ibid., I, 127.

⁴²Ibid., I, 130.

⁴³Ibid., I, 137.

⁴⁴Ibid., I, 133.

longer is the "devouring wolf" but the faithful shepherd's dog who now helps "preserve intact the flock's connection with the shepherd."⁴⁵

It points to areas of life in which obedience is required. It breaks up the will of God, which is to direct the believer's life, into its more specific commands, so that its applications to life can be more clearly seen. "The Law does not make the new man, but it does exercise him and shows him the full range of relationships in which his newness is relevant."⁴⁶

Thielicke also speaks of the new relationship of the justified man to the Law in its political use. The Christian man, like all other men, is subject to the Law as it effects God's will in the orders of creation. But there is a radical difference: whereas for the non-Christian man, the author of the Law is anonymous and obedience is rendered without regard to any relation to God, for the Christian, the author of the Law now has a name and a face. He is the Father of Jesus Christ, and thus, for the justified man, the Law becomes a "true anamnesis . . . of the one who encounters him in justification as the gracious God and who beyond that still wills to be gracious to him also in the political use of the Law."⁴⁷ Obedience to the Law within the spheres of the created orders will, therefore, be charged with love and thanksgiving. It is likewise in the midst of the orders that the Christian man encounters his neighbor. The usus politicus reminds him that he is "politically" related to his neighbor, and, thus, by setting

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid., I, 134.

⁴⁷Ibid., I, 146.

before him tasks and duties in the structures of society, the Law becomes "the servant of love in the political sphere."⁴⁸

In summary, while the function of the Law in the believer's life is "only very imperfectly suggested"⁴⁹ for Thielicke by the phrase tertius usus legis, he has no hesitancy in declaring that the Law does indeed retain a positive function for the Christian beyond its general "political use" and its accusatory "theological use." The Law is not only the harsh "schoolmaster" whose rod drives men to Christ for forgiveness. The Law serves a further pedagogical function in "lovingly guiding" those who are forgiven into an obedience ever more freely offered to God in an ever broadening range of life's tasks and relationships.

2. The Divine Command: Paul Althaus and Wilfried Joest.

Paul Althaus and Wilfried Joest, though they carry forward their work on the question of the tertius usus legis along somewhat different lines, reach similar conclusions. Both are wary of the actual phrase tertius usus legis, but both see, at the same time, a need for a way of speaking about the relation of God's will to the life of the justified man which the "third use" formulation intends to preserve.

Althaus makes his contribution to the discussion of this issue in an essay published in Germany in 1952 under the title, Gebot und

⁴⁸Ibid., I, 141f.

⁴⁹Ibid., I, 139.

Gesetz: Zum Thema "Gesetz und Evangelium." An English edition appeared in 1966 with the title, The Divine Command. Althaus suggests that Elert's summary rejection of the doctrine of the tertius usus ignores the truth which that doctrine contains. He notes that the declarative message of the Gospel itself implies an imperative and that the Bible unquestionably contains ethical teachings which must have some significance for the Christian. Althaus' proposal, in summary form, is,

. . . that we draw a distinction between "command" [Gebot] and "law" [Gesetz]: that is, between God's will for us, and the special form of that will as law. We can only do justice to what is really at stake in this discussion if we replace the two-term formula "law and gospel" with the three-term formula "command, law, gospel."⁵⁰

Althaus finds support for his distinction between "command" and "law" in the fact that the New Testament literature appears deliberately to avoid the term "law" when "dealing with the question of norms for the Christian life."⁵¹ In the ethical sections of the epistles, for examples, the phrases "will of God," or "acceptable to God," or "pleasing to God" are employed where the word "law" might have been expected.⁵² This corresponds to the fact that in "the primal state" reflected in the myths of Creation the will of God confronts man as "the divine command," the obverse side of the offer of love with which He originally meets man.⁵³ It represents His will that man let Him be the God who can give him life. This command is present for

⁵⁰Althaus, op. cit., p. 2.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 5.

⁵²Ibid., pp. 3-7.

⁵³Ibid., pp. 8f.

man before the Fall and without regard to sin.

It is only after the Fall that the will of God confronts man as "law," with all its connotations of accusation and condemnation. "The law is the form that God's will for man must take on account of sin."⁵⁴ The actual content of the Law is no different from the content of the command; only the form in which the will of God now confronts man is different. It is no longer an "all-embracing positive summons" to live before God with love and trust. Now, because of sin, God's will must come to man as a verbum alienum--a series of prohibitions which limit man and protect him against himself.⁵⁵ It stands before man as a sign of his loss of innocence and wholeness, and yet he attempts vainly to turn its impossible demands into a ladder for achieving salvation.⁵⁶

The advent of Christ and the Gospel marks the end of the Law but, according to Althaus, not of the command. The Law, with its power to accuse and condemn, is overcome by the Gospel's offer of a relationship determined by grace. Man once more stands before God with a freedom characteristic of his primal state, and, with this restoration of his original relationship, the Law is once more transposed into the form of "the divine command."⁵⁷ Again, it must be emphasized that there has been no change in content, but the fundamental shift in man's relationship to God has now transformed the mode in

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 12.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 15.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 17.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 26.

which he hears the address of God's will. Indeed, the command which now confronts man is "an element in the gospel";⁵⁸ it is a derivative of grace, in that there is no reality to the new life God offers except in the context of a re-ordering of all of life's relationships.⁵⁹

Althaus' description of the new life of the Christian follows along the same lines as Thielicke's discussion, noted above, of the juxtaposition of the indicative and the imperative.⁶⁰ The justified man is a new man in Christ; his life is characterized by a "holy dynamic" of love which needs no imperative to set it in motion. Yet, the Christian is a creature and a son who lives in willing but real subordination to his Creator and Father. Therefore, the will of God is still over his life as an imperative he confronts in "divine commands" which are "spoken afresh in each situation."⁶¹ God is Lord of

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 29. Cf. "The commandments are the call to observe responsibility for what is given." Gerhard Ebeling, "Theology and the Evidentness of the Ethical," Journal for Theology and Church, II (1965), 108. Also, "Christianity roots the sense of duty in the derived nature of each person. One might say it another way--the Christian understands himself to be obligated by a gift." Paul E. Holmer, "Law and Gospel Re-Examined," Theology Today, XI:3 (October 1953), 480.

⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 29-31. Cf. "Faith in forgiveness lives and has its validity only in a definite way of acting towards others." (p. 31).

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 33-42. Cf. "... our Christian life stands at all times under the double aspect of being and act, gift and assignment." (p. 41).

⁶¹Ibid., p. 43. Cf. "When we preach the Law, the most difficult part of it will always be to show men what the will of God really is in various concrete situations, and what it is that God asks of us. In doing this it will be important to make it clear for our hearers what a commandment really is. In other words, we must not pretend to give them unchangeable laws which we derive from the Bible; we must

the Christian, too, and he must always be prepared to check and align his own will with reference to the will of God. The "moral instructions" of the Bible, given in such passages as the Ten Commandments and the apostolic imperatives, serve as both "the norm and corrective" for the justified man's reading of God's will in the concrete circumstances of his life.⁶²

As a description of this process, Althaus finds the formula tertius usus legis unacceptable, because, in the light of the sharp contrast in which classic Reformation theology has set Law and Gospel, the term "Law" is now decisively stamped "with the ideas of accusation and condemnation."⁶³ Further, the term "Law" is suggestive of a legalistic understanding of ethics which is incompatible with the new freedom of the Christian man.⁶⁴ For these reasons, Althaus prefers to reserve the term "Law" for the "political" and especially the "theological" uses as Luther described them. Yet, he recognizes the importance of speaking positively about the place of ethical instruction and moral imperative within the Christian community. As descriptive of this task, he prefers the phrase, "the divine command."

Wilfried Joest, as noted above, arrives at a conclusion not dissimilar to Althaus' in this study of the tertius usus legis question. His work was published in Germany in 1951 under the title

show them what is good, righteous, equitable, and charitable in a given situation." Ragnar Bring, "Preaching the Law," Scottish Journal of Theology, XIII (1960), 23.

⁶²Ibid., pp. 44, 45. ⁶³Ibid., p. 45. ⁶⁴Ibid.

Gesetz und Freiheit. Joest insists on the maintenance of the clear Law/Gospel distinction in the heritage from Luther, but he cautions against a possible misunderstanding of that distinction. To speak of the distinction between Law and Gospel is not to posit a contradiction in God's will to and for man. The content of God's will is always the same; what the shift from Law to Gospel implies is a "reversal" in the ordering of the God-man relationship.⁶⁵ In the Law, the will of God encounters man as lex implenda ("Law to be fulfilled"); in the Gospel, the will of God encounters man as lex impleta ("Law which has been fulfilled.") Luther's quarrel, therefore, is not against "law-ness" in principle, but rather against the confusion of Law and Gospel as ways of salvation. Both Law and Gospel are God's "real Word and actual order," but in the first He charges man with the resolution of the question of salvation, whereas in the second, by a "reversal" of His way, He lays it upon Christ.

Joest finds the formula tertius usus legis problematic because, in terms of salvation history, the life of the justified man is already within the kairos of the Gospel.⁶⁶ The "order" of Law has been superceded in the "but now" of the coming of Christ. The reintroduction of "Law" at this point is improper, because it (Law) wants "to be Law there where Jesus Christ stands, because it goes forth in the name of Jesus Christ, because it wants to order life as Law in the

⁶⁵Joest, op. cit., p. 130; cf. p. 195.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 131.

name of the Gospel."⁶⁷ When this happens, Law overreaches its "salvation-history barrier."

Yet, Joest recognizes the intent of the tertius usus legis phrase to preserve the reality of an encounter of the believer with the will of God within the area of the Gospel. To say that the Law "always accuses" is not sufficient, for "Luther knows a command which --now certainly in, with and under the Gospel--gives concrete direction, and an obedience of faith which is united with freedom."⁶⁸ There is a sense in which the Gospel itself has the nature of a command. It does not permit men "to come to terms with the present time," but rather, the actual coming of God's future world into this aeon precipitates a "duellum" in which the Christian is involved.⁶⁹ As sinner, he still stands on the side of the world; but through baptism he also stands on the side of the coming Kingdom, with its dynamic thrust to transform all reality, and will be given assignments on its behalf:

These duties will be shown him; the place where, as a Christian he now stands will be shown him, and the work he must now do. It will be shown him with the words of the same Law which before showed him his sin and which still now shows him, the simul peccator, his sin.⁷⁰

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 195.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 131. Cf. "Christ is not the end of striving, for this would mean the death of man. He is the new point of departure for striving." Holmer, op. cit., p. 479.

⁷⁰Ibid.

The Law, however, does not now address a salvation-less man with the demand: "You must, therewith . . . ;" it addresses a man for whom the question of salvation has already been settled with the assurance: "You may, because" ⁷¹ Yet, this new obedience is not the spontaneity of instinctual "machinery-existence" (Getrieбен-werdens). ⁷² The freedom of the Christian man is not an autonomy in which such polarities as God and man, Word and hearing, the command and the "Yes" of obedience are cancelled. The freedom of the Christian man consists in his confrontation with a command no longer laden with the unresolved question of salvation.

We note here, as with Althaus, Joest's preference for the term "command" when speaking of the justified man's engagement by the will of God. He knows, however, that even "command" can become "Law," in the "pregnant" sense of accusation and judgment. This is so because the justified man is simul peccator, and, where he sees his failure to fulfill the command, the command slips easily again into lex implenda. Joest distinguishes, therefore, between a usus legalis of the command and a usus evangelicus, or the command as a usus practicus evangelii. ⁷³ This latter is what we meet in the paraenetic sections of the New Testament epistles and represents a contingent unity of Law and

⁷¹Ibid., p. 195.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ibid., p. 198; cf. p. 197.

Gospel. Usus practicus evangelii is to be preferred, however, to tertius usus legis, because "one cannot draw together the, 'You must, therewith. . . ' and the 'You can, because . . . ' as different sub-species under a higher concept 'Law.'" ⁷⁴

In summary, both Joest and Althaus find within the structure of Lutheran theology a basis for addressing the man who has responded in faith to the Gospel with "the call for obedience." Both shy away from designating this call "the third use of the Law." For Althaus, the phrase "the divine command" is descriptive of the imperative to which the Christian is called to respond. Joest speaks of a command which functions as a usus practicus evangelii. In either case, the right of the Lutheran preacher to include ethical instruction and exhortation in his sermons is legitimized.

3. "Didache" as Moral Instruction: C. H. Dodd.

C. H. Dodd's now-classic division of the Christian message into kerygma and didache has bearing on the subject of preaching in general and on the preaching of Law and Gospel in particular. He first made his proposal in The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments, published in 1936. In that volume, Dodd concentrated chiefly on an analysis of the content of the kerygma, the New Testament proclamation or preaching. The content of didache did not receive similar exposition until the publication in 1951 of Gospel and Law.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 198.

Dodd's fundamental thesis is that "preaching" and "teaching" represent two clearly differentiated acts in the early church, each with its distinctive content directed to a peculiar audience.

"Preaching," in Dodd's view, was a strictly missionary activity of the New Testament community, carried out among Jews and Gentiles by duly authorized apostles and evangelists with a view to conversion. It aimed at the incorporation of men into the eschatological Kingdom through baptism. Dodd arrived at a summary of the content of this missionary kerygma through an examination of the speeches in Acts, the "theological" sections of the Pauline epistles, and an analysis of other strains of tradition in the New Testament. Though there are peripheral variations in the content of the kerygma as among Pauline, Johannine, or Petrine traditions, at the core a solid unity in the message proclaimed is clearly discernible. Its outline, in its Pauline form, is as follows:

The prophecies are fulfilled, and the new Age
is inaugurated by the coming of Christ.
He was born of the seed of David.
He died according to the Scriptures, to deliver
us out of the present evil age.
He was buried.
He rose on the third day according to the
Scriptures.
He is exalted at the right hand of God, as Son
of God and Lord of quick and dead.
He will come again as Judge and Saviour of men.⁷⁵

⁷⁵C. H. Dodd, The Apostolic Preaching and Its Development
(New York: Harper & Brothers, 1936), p. 17.

It will be noted that this message, which in terms of Law/Gospel categories would certainly fall under "Gospel," contains no word about the nature of the new life to which the man who responds to the kerygma is called. Statements about that matter are reserved for didache, or "teaching." The act of teaching, according to Dodd, is to be sharply distinguished from preaching. It occurred not in public among non-believers but was directed always to those who stood inside the Christian community. Its content was almost entirely ethical instruction, informing those who were "in Christ" of the kind of life now required of them. In the words of Dodd's summary:

Those who responded to this [kerygmatic] appeal and placed themselves under the judgment and mercy of God as declared in Jesus Christ, became members of the community, the Church, within which the new life could be lived. These members were then instructed in the ethical principles and obligations of the Christian life. This course of instruction in morals, as distinct from the proclamation of the Gospel, is covered by the term "teaching," which in Greek is didache.⁷⁶

In terms of Law/Gospel categories, what Dodd is speaking about belongs under "Law," if one allows for a tertius usus legis, or, within the rubric of what Althaus and Joest speak of as "divine commands," or "apostolic imperatives." Such ethical instruction is to be distinguished from kerygma, yet it remains always organically related to it. New Testament didache is never presented detached from the kerygma of God's act in Christ. This fact is reflected, for example, in the Pauline epistles, where moral imperatives always follow an exposition

⁷⁶C. H. Dodd, Gospel and Law (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), p. 10.

of the basic kerygma, and in the Gospels, where Jesus' ethical teachings are set within the framework of the narrative of His mighty acts.⁷⁷

Followed to its logical conclusion, Dodd's argument means, as he put it himself, that "much of our preaching in the Church at the present day would not have been recognized by the early Christians as kerygma."⁷⁸ Or, to state it another way, a sermon which contains substantial elements of ethical instruction and exhortation could not qualify, in terms of Dodd's definition, as preaching. In fact, he classifies the ordinary sermon as either didache, paraklesis, or homilia, the latter being "the more or less informal discussion of various aspects of Christian life and thought, addressed to a congregation already established in the faith."⁷⁹

Dodd's thesis, however, has not remained unchallenged. For example, New Testament scholarship since the time of publication of The Apostolic Preaching has grown more sceptical about the reliability of the speeches in Acts as summaries of actual primitive missionary sermons.⁸⁰ Further, new material pertaining to the life of Judaism in the first century of the Christian era has shed light not available to

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 4-7.

⁷⁸ Dodd, The Apostolic Preaching, pp. 7-8.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 8.

⁸⁰ Robert C. Worley, Preaching and Teaching in the Earliest Church (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), p. 43-46. Cf. Chapter III of this book for an excellent summary of the criticism of Dodd which has appeared from many directions.

Dodd on the background out of which the earliest Christian preaching and teaching emerged.⁸¹

Most pertinent in terms of our interests is the charge that Dodd's division between kerygma and didache, preaching and teaching, is too sharp. It is impossible, according to Robert Mounce, to maintain from an analysis of the occurrences of the words "preaching" and "teaching" in the Synoptics that these were clearly differentiated activities in the ministry of Jesus. At the very least it can be said that Mark and Luke use "preaching" in a way "sufficiently broad to include 'teaching.'"⁸² Floyd Filson draws the same conclusion about the patterns reflected in the New Testament as a whole: ". . . preaching, in the actual form in which it occurred, included a great deal of what we think of as teaching."⁸³ Robert Worley, after surveying the appearances of "teaching" in the Synoptics, Acts and Paul, concludes that both teaching and preaching took place inside and outside the gathered community of the committed, so that Dodd's insistence that preaching is always missionary in nature and teaching always edificatory simply is not supportable.⁸⁴

⁸¹Ibid., pp. 56-70.

⁸²Robert H. Mounce, The Essential Nature of New Testament Preaching (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960).

⁸³Floyd V. Filson, Three Crucial Decades (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963), p. 44.

⁸⁴Worley, op. cit., p. 35.

But the overlapping nature of teaching and preaching pertains not only to form. It is equally so with regard to content. Most scholars today find Dodd's contention that didache was chiefly ethical instruction over-stated. Joachim Jeremias observes: "Dodd's definition of the didache as an ethical instruction is too narrow. The didache is not to be understood only as a kind of outer ring around the kerygma, but rather the kerygma itself was constantly repeated in these instructions to the congregation."⁸⁵ Teaching in the New Testament congregations included, in other words, not only the drawing of ethical implications from the Gospel but the rehearsal of the basic terms of the Gospel itself. Krister Stendahl makes the obverse point with regard to preaching and the kerygma. He argues that preaching can be "kerygmatic" without having kerygma as its content; it may, in fact, consist of a "kerygmatic" presentation of teaching or exhortation.⁸⁶ To suggest the integration of kerygma and didache in the New Testament preaching and teaching, Stendahl has coined the phrase "kerygmatic didache," and John Vincent has proposed "didactic kerygma." Mounce is pointing in the same direction when he states:

⁸⁵ Joachim Jeremias, The Sermon on the Mount (London: Athlone Press, 1961), p. 21.

⁸⁶ Reviewed in John J. Vincent, "Didactic Kerygma in the Synoptic Gospels," Scottish Journal of Theology, X (1957), 265, from Krister Stendahl, "Kerygma und Kerygmatisch: von Zweideutigen Ausdrucken der Predigt der Urkirche und Unserer," Theologische Literaturzeitung, LXXVII (1952), cols. 715-719.

. . . kerygma is foundation and didache is superstructure, but no building is complete without both. . . . All didache is based on kerygma, and it may be seriously doubted whether any kerygma ever stands without some measure of explanatory didache.⁸⁷

These corrections of Dodd's original analysis have made it possible for those engaged in teaching ministries within the church to reclaim the elements Dodd classified under kerygma as material with which they can legitimately be concerned. The kerygma has been recovered as subject matter for teaching as well as preaching. Conversely, the amending of Dodd's over-sharp distinctions opens up the sphere of ethical instruction to the preacher. Preaching in the congregation can appropriately embrace both an anamnesis of the kerygma and the "call to obedience." Such a conclusion is particularly welcome to Lutheran theology with its stress upon the Christian man as simul iustus et peccator. As peccator, he needs to hear again and again the original kerygma with its announcement of God's gracious act for him in Christ. As iustus, he is ready to hear instructions about the new life he is to live in Christ--not now as prerequisites to be fulfilled for the sake of justification but as "divine commands" which function as a usus practicus evangelii.

C. CRITERIA FOR PREACHING THE CALL TO OBEDIENCE TODAY

Out of our examination of Luther's theology and practice and our discussion of certain contemporary approaches to the question of the place of "Law," or the "divine command," or "ethical instruction" in

⁸⁷ Mounce, op. cit., pp. 42-43.

the life of the Christian man, we are able to formulate the following criteria for preaching "the call to obedience" today:

1. The call to obedience will have a significant place in Lutheran preaching.

There is nothing in Luther to support a view that preaching must stop short with the preaching of Law, in its "theological use," and Gospel. While it appears to be true that Luther does not follow Melanchthon and Calvin in explicitly positing a tertius usus legis, neither is he silent about the fact that the justified man needs guidance and encouragement in the living of the new life he has been granted in the Gospel. He knows the propensity of faith to "fall asleep," and his own sermons contain regular exhortations for the Christian to re-present in his own relationships with his neighbor the same love he has received from God in Christ. Neither is there lacking more specific guidance as to the way Christians ought to behave in particular spheres of life, e.g., the institution of marriage.

Thielicke, Althaus and Joest all agree that there is nothing in Luther's theology that precludes--indeed, there is much that necessitates--a serious concern with the ethical character of the life the believer is called to live. Looked at in one way, this new life is a spontaneous overflow of the "is-ness" of the man in Christ; but, from another standpoint, man as the creature and servant of God always--even as justified--stands under an "ought" that is addressed to him by his Creator and Lord. Thielicke prefers to speak of this "ought" in terms

of the Law as "loving reminder"; Althaus and Joest favor "divine command," "apostolic imperative," or usus practicus evangelii. In any case, their work demonstrates that Lutheran preaching today cannot be faithful to its heritage from Luther himself if it neglects a "call to obedience" which grows out of the response of faith to the promise of the Gospel.

The work done on Dodd's thesis during the last three decades lends support to this conclusion from another direction entirely. It now appears that his distinction between kerygma and didache was too sharply drawn, and sermons which contain significant elements of ethical teaching and exhortation need no longer be disqualified as "preaching." Indeed, "kerygmatic didache," or "didactic kerygma"--the intermingling of proclamation and teaching, ethical or otherwise--seems to be the norm held before us by the New Testament itself.

2. The sermon will sound the call to obedience as a consequence of grace and not its cause.

Luther's clarity with regard to "good works" as a "fruit" of justification and not its foundation is of central importance. In sharpest opposition to medieval Roman theology which urged men to contribute to their salvation by acts of obedience, Luther argued--often violently--that "good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works." Grace, for Luther is always the source of obedience, not its result. It is undoubtedly the urgency with which he struggled to establish the primacy of "grace" over "works" that has opened him--as

Paul before him--to the charge of subverting ethics.

The contemporary sources examined uphold, with Luther, the priority of "justification" to "sanctification." Dodd, in spite of his overdrawn distinction between kerygma and didache, is absolutely clear about the fact that ethical instruction, if it is to remain true to the New Testament witness, dare not be torn loose from its rootage in the soil of the message of God's act in Christ. Althaus, too, is careful to locate the re-entry of the "divine command" in the God-man relationship on this side of man's response to the Gospel. Likewise, Joest, by describing the paraenetic material of the New Testament as usus practicus evangelii, preserves the proper relationship between grace and obedience.

Where preaching fails to respect the order just described, the sermon degenerates into "legalism" or "moralism." It lays upon people new demands without offering them the promise and power of grace. It overrides the indicative mood, which must remain central and dominant in Christian proclamation, with the imperative mood, whose appropriate function is secondary and responsory. Only where the "call to obedience" is heard within the context of the offer of grace does the sermon maintain its evangelical character, even while it attends to its task of ethical guidance.

3. The sermon will articulate the call to obedience with concreteness.

Luther's capacity on occasion for specificity in delineating the contours of the life incumbent upon the Christian man has been

noted. Often he is content to urge in a general way that the Christian act in love, or become "a little Christ" to his neighbor, but he can also talk concretely about duties of citizenship, relationships within the home, and even how one should clothe himself and how much he should drink at a wedding! Obviously, the actual "applications" drawn in his writings and sermons are intended for the social, political and economic circumstances of sixteenth century Germany, but they suggest in principle that the preaching of obedience must not be allowed to dissipate in vague generalities.

Thielicke seems to be calling for this same concreteness when he states that the Law as "loving reminder" will show a man "the full range of relationships in which his newness is relevant."⁸⁸ It will point out "unredeemed areas" in his life and, presumably, offer guidance in the kinds of decisions and actions which will draw those areas into the sphere of redemption. Althaus declares that the "divine commands" are "spoken afresh in each situation," suggesting the responsibility of the preacher to be one voice through which the Christian community speaks and hears the will of God for the specific circumstances in which it finds itself.

As Ragnar Bring has pointed out, such "concreteness" in speaking about the will of God is the "most difficult part" of preaching the

⁸⁸ Cf. p. 191 above.

Law.⁸⁹ It involves always the risk that one will misread "the divine command" amid the complexities of the issues that men face in modern life. But if the "call to obedience" is not to be so diffuse as to be pointless, the preacher--informed by the tradition, in conversation with the community and guided by the Spirit--must take the risk of being as concrete in his articulations of the shape of obedience as he can.

4. The sermon will point to spheres of obedience in the public as well as the personal sector.

Here, Luther's insistence upon the "secular" character of the Christian man's good works offers an opening for preaching to give attention to the nature of obedience in the political and economic spheres. In Luther's view, the Christian discovered the obligations of love in the mundane sphere of his "station" within the orders of creation.⁹⁰ It was as he faithfully fulfilled his function as citizen, magistrate, parent, soldier, etc., that he learned what it means to serve the neighbor.

It is true that for Luther, in a hierarchical and authoritarian society, the forms of such "secular" obedience seldom involved the reshaping of the structures of society itself, but, in a participatory democracy, it is possible for the contemporary preacher to discover

⁸⁹Cf. footnote #61, p. 195.

⁹⁰Cf. p. 184 above.

broader implications in Luther's thought. This seems to be the point Thielicke is making when he speaks of the Law, in its continuing use for the Christian, as "the servant of love in the political sphere."⁹¹ By reminding men of God's will for a just and compassionate ordering of life in society, the Law suggests to Christians that they bear a responsibility for the way society is shaped. If they are under obligation to love the neighbor, the form in which they exercise that love will often be defined in terms of political action.

It is especially important for Lutheran preaching--granted Lutheranism's reputation for social quietism--to pick up such cues from Luther and his contemporary interpreters. Such massive and complex problems as war, poverty, environmental blight, and racial injustice can scarcely be avoided, and, if preaching is silent with regard to them, it will leave people largely without guidance as to appropriate responses in areas where human life is most in jeopardy.

⁹¹Cf. p. 192 above.

CHAPTER VI

THE CALL TO OBEDIENCE IN HOFFMANN AND STEIMLE

On the basis of the theoretical work done in Chapter V, we turn now to a description and evaluation of the ways in which Hoffmann and Steimle sound "the call to obedience" in their preaching. Here we will be dealing with material which Thielicke would categorize as "the Law as loving reminder," or, which Althaus and Joest would designate "the divine command" or usus practicus evangelii. In terms of C. H. Dodd's analysis (though our study in the preceding chapter calls the sharpness of his differentiations into question), we will be devoting attention to didache-type material.

It should be noted, in this connection, that the sermons examined contain a large quantity of didache which has no direct relationship to the ethical consequences of faith. Both Hoffmann and Steimle include within their "preaching" substantial quantities of "teaching" dealing with such varied matters as historico-exegetical questions--e.g., the nature of the Transfiguration (Hoffmann), the identity of the "wise men," (Hoffmann), the proper interpretation of the parable of the Sower (Steimle); theological issues--e.g., the relation of faith to hope (Hoffmann), the meaning of creeds and dogma (Steimle), the relationship between nature and grace (Steimle); and, occasionally, liturgical considerations--e.g., the meaning of Advent (Steimle), the proper keeping of Lent (Steimle). The sermons, likewise, contain hortatory material which has no immediate connection

with the ethical dimension of life. Both preachers, for example, call upon their hearers to be steadfast in the face of suffering. The description and evaluation in this chapter will not deal with extra-ethical dimensions of teaching and exhortation. The focus will be more narrowly upon "the call to obedience" as it reaches men in terms of the ethical consequences of faith.

A. OSWALD HOFFMANN

Paraenetic material is widely scattered through the Hoffmann sermons. Though his dominant themes in preaching are unquestionably judgment and forgiveness, he does not neglect the call to obedience. For the sake of clarity, we will examine passages which deal with the nature of the new life which issues from justification under three headings: (1) The "Activism" of Faith; (2) The Call to Love; (3) The Fulfilling of the Office.

1. The "Activism" of Faith.

Hoffmann recognizes that "justification" is not the final word in the Christian vocabulary. He speaks frequently and urgently about a "style of life" which must characterize the Christian man and the Christian community. Faith is not passive trust but a dynamic force which drives life in new directions. In one sermon, he quotes with approval Luther's well-known description of faith:

Oh, a living, energetic, mighty thing is faith. It is impossible for it not to do good incessantly. Nor does it ask whether good works are to be done; but before the question is put, it has already done and is forever doing good The Holy Spirit of

God creates this attitude of faith. Hence a person, without restraint, becomes willing and eager to do good to everybody, to serve everybody, to suffer all sorts of things, for the love of God and to the praise of Him Who has shown him such grace.¹

Hoffmann has obviously been in touch also with contemporary ecclesiological literature which decries the ingrown institutionalism of the church and seeks to re-orient it to its servant role in the world. He acknowledges the justness of much of the criticism of the church:

All too often the organizations of the church have only one purpose: to perpetuate themselves. They forget their mission to the world. It has happened that the church has become anti-world, without any idea of reconciliation or salvation.²

The above passage occurs in the context of a sermon whose message to this point has been the offer of God's reconciling love in Christ to a world "broken" by sin. Now the shift is made from the reality of God's people as objects of reconciliation to their task as agents of reconciliation. Church people who simply occupy a "comfortable pew," unmotivated by any concern for the world and "unwilling to do anything to help the world in its brokenness,"³ do not qualify as followers of Jesus Christ. Granted that evil has reached apocalyptic dimensions today, the proper stance of the Christian is not to turn his back on the world: "This is no time to concede the world to the devil or to sit around kicking and screaming about the wickedness of nations

¹Oswald Hoffmann, "Obedience to the Unenforceable," p. 4. All of Hoffmann's sermons are printed by (St. Louis: Lutheran Layman's League, 1968).

²Oswald Hoffmann, "Healing In Christ: You and Others," p. 5.

³Ibid.

as the commentators do."⁴ Rather, as Hoffmann declares in another sermon, the Christian, with his citizenship secure in heaven, works vigorously at his citizenship on earth. He is "no escapist," but finds the cues for his world-ward orientation in such a symbol as Jesus' characterization of the disciples as "the salt of the earth":

[Christians] have been put into this world to be salt, a preservative to hold back corruption and a flavor to give new taste to life. The followers of Christ cannot just go around minding their own business, staying out of trouble, and bothering nobody. Our Lord did not act that way, and His followers can't either.⁵

This "activism" of those who constitute the Body of Christ represents obedience to the will of Him who is their Lord; yet it is no ordinary obedience. Obedience often suggests submission, under threat of punishment, to an external rule. In a sermon aptly entitled "Obedience to the Unenforceable" and appropriately based on Jeremiah 31:31-34, with its description of the "new covenant," Hoffmann attempts to articulate the paradoxical nature of Christian obedience. It is spontaneous, yet not--in Joest's words--instinctual, "machinery-existence," in which the will has no part. It involves an act of commitment, yet that act does not abrogate the spontaneity which Thielicke characterizes as an "automatism of good works." In the actual sermon, Hoffmann avoids a technical, theological vocabulary, and allows himself the rare (for him) privilege of poetic expression:

⁴Oswald Hoffmann, "The Sanctity of Human Life," p. 6; cf. "It is not enough for followers of Christ to wring their hands and deplore things as they are in the world, to keep their noses clean and stay out of trouble." (Oswald Hoffmann, "Say Yes to Life," p. 5.)

⁵Oswald Hoffmann, "Hope Not In Politicians," p. 5.

The sun must shine. The wind must blow. The bird must sing. The flower must bloom. The follower of Christ must do acts of kindness and love. This is obedience, not to some enforceable law, but to the unenforceable urge that grows and glows, blooms and sings within the soul of a man who has really come to know Jesus Christ.⁶

2. The Call to Love.

The assertion that obedience is spontaneous and "unenforceable" lives in the Hoffmann sermons alongside the exhortation to obey. This fact reflects what we have noted in the previous chapter about the ineradicable tension between the indicative and the imperative in the Christian life.⁷ But often the imperative and its companion, the hortatory, sound in Hoffmann's preaching in a very generalized way. Listeners are urged to "have the light of Christ" in their eyes,⁸ to "witness" to Him,⁹ to "follow Him, serve Him . . . ,"¹⁰ etc. Hoffmann employs such hortatory statements quite generously in his preaching. Sometimes the content of what is being called for is evident in the surrounding context, but there are also passages where exhortations to discipleship are unaccompanied by any definition of what concrete acts of discipleship may involve.

⁶Hoffmann, "Obedience to the Unenforceable," pp. 4-5.

⁷Cf. p. 188 above.

⁸Hoffmann, "Say Yes to Life," p. 5.

⁹Hoffmann, "The End Is the Beginning," p. 5.

¹⁰Oswald Hoffmann, "Who Is In Charge Here?" p. 6.

Hoffmann comes closest to filling the "call to obedience" with content in those passages in which he speaks of the Christian life in terms of a love whose paradigm is Christ. There is a motif recurring in his sermons which describes the way of life engendered by faith in a fashion similar to Joseph Sittler's characterization of it as "a re-enactment from below on the part of men of the shape of the revelatory drama of God's holy will in Jesus Christ."¹¹ The Christian ethic is viewed as a recapitulation ethic. The style of the believer's life in the world is seen as a re-presentation of the graciousness and condescension of God, manifested in His coming to us in the person of Christ. Hoffmann expresses this in a variety of ways. In his sermon on the healing of the leper, he declares the central message of what miracle-story to be: "Christ is not afraid to reach out and touch you." But the consequent message is: "Don't be afraid to reach out and touch people in the name of Christ."

Don't be afraid to touch the disappointed and depressed, the sad and the sorrowing, the sick and the dying. Don't be afraid to touch people with the healing touch of Christ. Don't be afraid to touch your neighbor's doorbell or even to touch his heart with the help and healing offered in the name of Christ. Dare to touch, and Christ will act through you.¹²

¹¹ Joseph Sittler, The Structure of Christian Ethics. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1958), p. 36. Somewhere Sittler speaks of the "gull-like swoop" of grace described in the Creed--a configuration the Christian is to trace out in his dealings with his neighbor.

¹² Oswald Hoffmann, "Dare to Ask. Dare to Touch," p. 5.

Again, we have noted that one of Hoffmann's ways of phrasing the Gospel is to say that "Jesus Christ has a heart for you."¹³ Analogously, he can say that "following Christ means, above all, to have a heart for others."¹⁴ As Christ came to heal the hurts of mankind, so His followers in this and every age are called to be "a healing and reconciling force amid the brokenness of the world."¹⁵ This reflexive relationship between Christ and His people receives special emphasis in the sermon, "Take Heart," based on I John 2:12-17. Hoffmann is struck particularly by the recurrence of the verb "overcome" in this passage. It is a word which characterizes the peculiar quality of Jesus' life. He "overcame" all the evil the world threw in His way. He refused to say, "I quit"; He would not walk out on His disciples or reject them even when, on the last night, He met with their betrayal and desertion. He is a "fantastic forgiver," and this staying power of love, which overcomes all enmity and hostility by reaching out to men with a love that "knows no boundaries" is to be a mark of Christ's people. The church is "the fellowship of the faithful who are not afraid to love."¹⁶

In one sermon, Hoffmann calls for an expression of love particularly welcome from one who preaches from within the context of the

¹³Cf. p. 134 above.

¹⁴Hoffmann, "Healing In Christ: You and Others," p. 4.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Oswald Hoffmann, "Take Heart," p. 5.

Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, with its traditional stance of aloofness toward and even rejection of other denominations. Significantly, he chooses Reformation Sunday as an occasion not to extol his own tradition, but to speak for the unity of the church. The church, he argues, is already one in Christ, and the forces which pull away from the center cannot destroy this unity which is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Yet, at the same time, there are obvious disunities which cannot be ignored. Not all differences among Christians are destructive, but Hoffmann sharply rebukes those who "have held themselves aloof in haughty pride from fellow Christians, and have lived in a darkness of suspicion and ignorance of their own making."¹⁷ Devotion to truth is not to become a mask for the failure of love, but the truth which is in Christ reaches its expression precisely in love for those with whom we disagree. The church is to be that community where, as Hoffmann puts it in another sermon, "people [give] their hearts to God, and their hands to each other."¹⁸

3. The Fulfilling of the "Office."

It will be noted that, except in the matter of ecumenism described immediately above, Hoffmann does not move far beyond a general appeal for Christians to "live in love, as Christ has loved us." The life the Christian is called to live is seldom delineated with precision in terms of the actualities of existence. The exceptions to

¹⁷ Oswald Hoffmann, "One Church," p. 5.

¹⁸ Oswald Hoffmann, "Healing In Christ: You and God," p. 5.

this rather generalized approach are in occasional sermons where Hoffmann turns to one of the "orders" in which men live, and speaks of how Christians should there fulfill their "office" or "station."

Three of these sermons are directed to the sphere of family life, and one of these three has as its particular target the "office" of parenthood. "The Price of Permissiveness," as we noted in Chapter II, is dominated by a lengthy section of judgment in which Hoffmann castigates what to him seem tragically over-indulgent patterns of parent-child relationships. He traces a whole array of evil developments to their root in the unwillingness or inability of adults to take a firm hold on the parental office they have been given by God. He issues a mild warning in passing against "foolish repressiveness," but his real fire is reserved for "foolish permissiveness." Parents, of course, are to avoid the hypocrisy of setting standards for their children by which they do not intend to live themselves. Just as damaging, however, is an abdication of authority which suggests to children an absence of concern about what they do or "how they turn out." Children quickly lose respect for parents "who do not have the inner strength to make the hard moral decisions that have to be made."¹⁹ Hoffman parodies the over-permissive father as being like an anxious politician constantly checking the popularity polls to determine his standing: "Fathers you are not running for an office. You hold an

¹⁹ Oswald Hoffmann, "The Price of Permissiveness," p. 5.

office. It is your duty to fulfill it."²⁰ Aside from the call to parents to re-assert the authority incumbent upon their office, Hoffmann has other suggestions to offer:

Parents who follow Jesus Christ are very conscious of their own shortcomings and of the fact that they have been forgiven by God. Forgiven people will treat their children as human beings. It is not at all out of place for parents to discuss matters with their children before reaching a decision on what must be done in a particular situation.²¹

In short, good parents are "the agents of God, not willing to pay the price of permissiveness but ready to pay the price of love."²²

A second sermon, "Phony Families," which ventures into the sphere of family living, is broader in its focus. Here, too, Hoffmann attacks over-permissiveness in terms of the "phony father" who has his office in title only. His over-arching theme, however, is the devaluation of love in contemporary family life. A "phony father" is one who doesn't care enough for his child to say, "No." A "phony marriage" is one into which people enter only "to be loved by someone else instead of giving active love themselves."²³ A "phony family" is one in which value scales have been turned upside down and success is measured solely in materialistic terms. Hoffmann's call to parents who must rear their families in such a noxious climate is to "make God the third partner in your marriage."²⁴ This will mean looking upon one's marriage partner as something more than a "possession or a conquest" and establishing parent-child relationships in which love is genuine

²⁰ Ibid., p. 6.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Oswald Hoffmann, "Phony Families," p. 4.

²⁴ Ibid.

enough to be firm.

In "The Green and the Golden," Hoffmann addresses himself to the special problems of the aged in today's society. After assuring them that the long road they have travelled has not carried them beyond God's love, he offers them counsel about how a Christian person will handle his closing years. He will avoid self-pity. He will not brood on his ailments and limitations. He will remember his own youth and not judge harshly those who now "have to go through the same period of storm and stress."²⁵ He will learn to listen to young people in a way that will bridge the generation gap--so that "the golden will be honored by the green."²⁶

In addition to the sermons which call for Christian responses in the various "offices" of family life, there is one in which Hoffmann speaks to the political order. Preached near Election Day, "Hope Not In Politicians" is, on the one hand, a call to politicians not to presume that they are "the hope of the world," and, on the other hand, a call to the average citizen to assume the obligations which his dual role as a citizen of the Kingdom of God and a citizen of the state lay upon him. For one thing, people are not to blame the problems of the world on those who hold political office. Politicians generally reflect and are usually helpless against the tide of the people's own selfish purposes: "When people act like animals crowding one another

²⁵ Oswald Hoffmann, "The Green and the Golden," p. 5.

²⁶ Ibid.

away from the feeding trough of an advanced technology, politicians are going to go along with the whole process."²⁷ Therefore, trusting in God's mercy and acknowledging Christ's Lordship, Christians are to become a redemptive force in the political order. Aware of the limitations of political authority, they will also affirm its legitimacy and will honor those who hold political office. As to their own civic responsibilities, they will take them "seriously." They will learn to respect the opinions of those with whom they don't agree and will pray for those in authority and all whom they govern.

B. EDMUND STEIMLE

As one moves from Hoffmann's sermons to those of Steimle, he becomes aware of a marked change of tone in the way the call to obedience is handled. Where Hoffmann casts his material in the imperative and hortatory moods, Steimle is apt to be indicative and descriptive. His concern is to analyze the dynamic origins of the Christian way of life and then to suggest characteristic marks of its style. He is descriptive rather than prescriptive. He offers not so much ethical counsel as clarification of what a Christian man looks like as he moves through the world. Rarely, if ever, does he begin a sentence with the "Let us . . . ," of classic exhortation; his style is more to entice than to exhort--to picture, in a way calculated to win our response, the necessary implications of the acceptance of

²⁷Hoffmann, "Hope Not In Politicians," p. 4.

grace. We will arrange his material in this area of preaching under two headings: (1) The Dynamic Source of the Christian Life; and, (2) The Characteristic Style of the Christian Life.

1. The Dynamic Source of the Christian Life.

One of Steimle's obvious concerns is to say what needs to be said about the obligations of the Christian life in a context which will not compromise the "gift" character of salvation. He is wary of any tendency toward moralism or legalism in describing the nature of the life that follows justification. For this reason, he occasionally addresses himself directly to the question of the relationship between "faith" and "works," or "grace" and "duty" in the Christian life.

The chief point, for example, of "Voices in the Dark" is to delineate the way in which "assurance" and "demand" belong together in the Christian message. His text is Isaiah's word to the Hebrew exiles in Babylon, in which both assurance ("Comfort, comfort my people. . .") and demand ("In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord. . .") resound. It is an Advent sermon, and Steimle's first point is that just as God's Word of assurance spoke to the exiles in their darkness and spoke again in the midnight coming of the Child in the stable, so He is most apt to make His voice heard among us when evil seems to shroud our world with darkness. But after the Word of assurance--never before--God always speaks His Word of demand. Indeed, demand cannot be separated from assurance, for, as we learn in family life, "love that makes no demands is not love"--only "wishy-washy sentimentality

[that] destroys rather than recreates."²⁸ Real love always requires a response; in fact, one can only appropriate the voice of assurance by acting on the voice of demand. It is appropriate, therefore, for Steimle to close this sermon with two sayings of Jesus which appear contradictory but are actually complementary: "I am come that ye might have life Take up your cross and follow me."

A similar point is made in the sermon, "When Religion Is a Burden," based on Matthew 11:28-30. Religion is an oppressive burden, Steimle asserts, when the church becomes simply one more institution to support, or the Christian life a dreary list of duties to fulfill. Christ came, as the text states, to give men "rest," yet, for many, Christianity has become one more weight on top of an already intolerably burdened life. Steimle then moves into a forceful articulation of the Gospel as the message of a God Who does not ask men to carry Him but Who carries them with His grace. Christ meant religion to be refreshment, not burden. Yet, there must be no misunderstanding:

. . . it's not just a lark, either. There is a yoke to be taken and a burden too. It is not a running away from responsibilities and duties, or an escape. . . . The chores, the tasks, the demands are still there--only now they have been multiplied!²⁹

But, paradoxically, the added tasks and demands are borne more easily--the "burden is light"--because at the center of the Christian man's life is a relationship determined by love and trust. Characteristically,

²⁸Edmund A. Steimle, Disturbed By Joy (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), p. 30.

²⁹Edmund A. Steimle, Are You Looking for God? (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), p. 62.

Steimle turns to analogy to illumine the dynamics of this relationship:

. . . religion is very much like falling in love. If you fall in love at the edges, with money or good looks, or out of a sense of responsibility, your marriage is headed straight for trouble because it is an intolerable burden. Fall in love with a person at the center, and the edges will pretty well take care of themselves. So with religion. Let the edges of it--duty, or creeds, or a church with its ceremonies and organizational machinery--elbow God out of the center of it and it is no better than Bel and Nebo, intolerable burdens to be hoisted and hauled. . . . But fall in love with God at the center, and the edges of life, with the duties, the creeds, the ceremonies, and the machinery will pretty much take care of themselves.³⁰

The paragraph just quoted unquestionably suggests a portrait of the Christian man dominated by such hues as "spontaneity" and "freedom" rather than "effort" and "discipline." The Christian life is more the fruit of what a man is than the product of what he wills.

Yet, the New Testament clearly uses both the indicative and the imperative in speaking about the new life in Christ. Steimle analyzes the relationship between the language of "is" and the language of "ought" in a sermon entitled, "The Paradox in Living Like a Christian." On the one hand, Steimle notes, the New Testament describes the Christian life in such a way that no amount of striving can possibly achieve it. Christians are called upon to manifest such qualities as joy and unself-conscious love, neither of which can be produced by an act of the will. But at the same time, the New Testament is filled with imperatives and exhortations, as though the new life in Christ could come by "direct assault."

³⁰Ibid., p. 64.

Here, then, is the paradox in living like a Christian. It's obvious we can't just sit on our hands and wait for the Spirit of God to move us to acts of love. And yet if we spit on our hands and go to work, apparently that's not going to get us anywhere either so far as capturing the essential quality of the Christian life is concerned.³¹

The secret, argues Steimle, is to work--but not "at the thing itself." He sees an analogy in the way his college age daughter and her friends go about getting dates. Those who are over-anxious about falling in love and see every male as a potential husband will probably miss what they're after. The answer, however, isn't to just sit at home and do nothing. A girl must work at making herself attractive and available, and then one day the mysterious attraction that results in love will occur. So, the Christian must work hard at maintaining the discipline of prayer, doing his immediate duties, and, above all, keeping before himself the image of Christ, if he is to reach that goal of "the mind of Christ" which no amount of striving can achieve. The conscious effort daily to bring "into your mind and flood your imagination with the picture of incarnate love" is crucial, because "we tend to become like that with which we live and spend much of our time."³² Thus, we do what we must and trust that our failures will be taken up by a love that forgives them and engenders the unconscious "accent" of grace in our lives. But the paradox remains: "The one thing we cannot possibly capture by direct assault, simply by

³¹Steimle, Disturbed By Joy, p. 114.

³²Ibid., p. 117.

effort, can come to us only as we give ourselves to the effort."³³

2. The Characteristic Style of the Christian Life.

Just as Steimle takes pains to identify the dynamic source of the Christian life, so he tries at various points in his sermons, to sketch out a pattern for the characteristic style of the Christian life. As indicated above, his approach is more descriptive than prescriptive. His "call to obedience" comes not so much through direct commands and exhortations as through indicative statements which suggest the peculiar "flavor," or "stance," or "style" of the Christian. What he has to say can be organized under three qualities:

(a) Freedom; (b) Spaciousness; (c) Participation.

a. Freedom. The "freedom of the Christian man" is expressed in what Steimle characterizes as a "light-hearted" or "light-fingered" attitude toward life. This quality is delineated in the sermon "Strangers and Pilgrims," where Steimle not only speaks, as we have seen, a word of hope into man's transient and impermanent situation in this world, but also gives some attention to the life style which issues from that hope. For the man who is without such hope, life is something "to be squeezed by the throat until it surrenders itself to our appetite for a false and spurious security."³⁴ He attempts vainly to "transform an inn into a permanent home," and thus becomes bound to the very realities which were to end his quest for freedom from anxiety.

³³Ibid., p. 115.

³⁴Ibid., p. 176.

His "little securities of family and fortune" become tyrants which enslave him to frantic efforts for their preservation. The Christian man, by contrast, has given up his illusion about the possibility for any enduring security on earth, because, in the strength of his "citizenship in heaven," he no longer needs to nourish that illusion. He has freedom to "let go" of the "little securities" because he has found an ultimate one, and this discovery awakens in him a "light-hearted attitude, or perhaps 'light-fingered' is the better phrase, a kind of openhanded attitude toward life here on earth."³⁵ He experiences a freedom unknown to the man who imagines that this earth is his only "life-home." Having come to terms with his own real status as a "stranger and pilgrim," he is able to offer himself back to the world and its needs in a way that would not be possible if he were ultimately dependent upon it.

The man of faith is free from the fundamental anxieties and frustrations of his own existence to give himself in love to others. For no man is free to love until and unless he is freed from an overweening concern for his own future and destiny.³⁶

Steimle deals with essentially this same quality in a sermon, "The Patience and Impatience of God." He begins by describing our time as "an age in a hurry," enamoured, on one level, by speed records and feverish, on another level, for immediate solutions to massive and complex problems. Steimle reminds his listeners that in the New Testament, as in the story of Jesus' wilderness temptation, it is the devil who "is always trying to rush things," whereas the biblical

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 177.

image of God is that of One whose patience with our "harried pettiness and frantic indifference to him" is amazing, just as His refusal to deal in peremptory fashion with evil can be "utterly maddening." But the man of faith knows how to "wait on the Lord." He is released from "hot and hasty demands and desires" of his own and is given freedom to abide God's unhurried ways: "Faith is not faith until it is willing to stop in its mad rush in order to 'wait on the Lord,' and to accept the marvelous patience of God with us."³⁷

b. Spaciousness. We noted in Chapter IV Steimle's use of such terms as "fullness" and "extravagance" to suggest the limitless grace of God and his corresponding characterization of salvation as "enlargement" or "room."³⁸ One consequence of the response of faith to the lavishness of grace is an expansion of the horizons of the Christian man. A life which had formerly been cramped in its style and narrow in its outlook now is marked by a certain breadth of perspective and "spaciousness" of affection.

Steimle describes this "fruit of faith" in a number of sermons. In "The Extravagant Kindness," the counterpoint to the proclamation of God's prodigal goodness is judgment upon man's narrow selfishness and the call to a style of life which has within it "a reckless streak," answering to God's own "extravagant kindness." Steimle notes Jesus' delight in people who exhibited this quality--the widow throwing her whole livelihood into the temple box, Zacchaeus impulsively scrambling

³⁷ Ibid., p. 146.

³⁸ Cf. pp. 154-155.

up the sycamore tree, the little child with its "delightfully unself-conscious joy in living." In fact, unlimited horizons, Steimle suggests, may have been among the ingredients of the style of life Jesus was insisting upon when He said, "Except ye become as little children" This is certainly true with regard to the length of life: for a child, the future seems limitless in its span and its possibilities. But it is also true with regard to the breadth of life:

No limits there, either. For the child, untouched by adult prejudice, there are no boundaries. White skin, black, or brown, what difference does it make other than just another instance of life's infinite variety and capacity for surprise?³⁹

This same theme is present in "This Is the Life!" where Steimle defines salvation as "a vast roominess under God."⁴⁰ Nothing is more contrary to the "exultant spaciousness" of life in Christ than the "dull, cramped business of placing one cautious and respectable foot in front of another."⁴¹ Christian faith, when it is genuine, "opens up vistas." It is impatient with walls, and, especially in the present situation, will be constantly breaking down the barriers of prejudice which separate men from each other. The Lenten sermon, "Sight for the Blind," makes a similar point in calling people to an observance of that season which will not be preoccupied with morbid introspection and petty self-denials but will be searching for the places where God is pressing upon our lives with the "attack of grace." His goal is "enlargement, . . . new dimensions, . . . broadened horizons, . . .

³⁹Steimle, Are You Looking for God?, p. 152.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 115.

⁴¹Ibid.

lifted ceilings," and the gift of "eyes to see new openings in the communities in which [we] live to bring enlargement to the lives of people hemmed in by poverty and injustice and fear and disease and ignorance."⁴²

Spaciousness, however, is not to be confused with what the world ordinarily counts as "bigness." Our society is marked by "an insatiable appetite for size and bigness,"⁴³ but--and this is a recurrent motif in Steimle's preaching--God is always confounding human measurement by choosing to work His wonders through the small and apparently inconsequential.

So our Lord . . . is forever picking out some insignificant detail and making that important: five loaves and two fishes--two small fishes--among five thousand; the tiniest seed he could think of, a mustard seed; the smallest coin in circulation, a widow's mite; a lily, a sparrow, a pinch of salt. All this is to accustom our eyes to a new way of looking at things; that size and bigness are often enough a delusion and a snare, and the small and insignificant are loaded with possibilities.⁴⁴

This pattern is most dramatically exemplified in God's choice of "an obscure little nomadic tribe" to be His people and in the insignificance, so far as contemporary world history was concerned, of the Incarnation. Steimle uses this description of God's economy as a basis for calling the "little people"--all the "one talent" persons who make up the vast majority of any community--to obedience. They are not to dodge the investment of their lives in the fulfillment of

⁴²Steimle, Disturbed By Joy, p. 63.

⁴³Steimle, Are You Looking for God? p. 96.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 96-97.

God's purposes of love for the world by arguing their own insignificance. Rather, exactly as they are--with seemingly little to offer, and where they are--with apparently limited horizons of opportunity, they are to seek to discover their place in God's plan.

. . . God wants you to know, whether you believe it or not and no matter how incredible it may seem to you, that all heaven is at this very moment wondering about you and what kind of person you are going to be; because the only kind of heaven God knows for the earth is the heaven he can bring to the earth only through you.⁴⁵

Related to this quality of "spaciousness" in the Christian life, is the capacity of the man of faith to see the significance of Christ's Lordship for every realm of creation. Christ's redemptive grace impinges not only upon the "religious" dimension of life but it thrusts out to affect everything from the atom to the "infinite galaxies of stars in space." This is the "ethical" point Steimle sees in the nature-miracle of the stilling of the storm. It signifies that the love incarnate in Christ is to have sway over the ways in which men utilize the vast resources of the natural world. Men who acknowledge

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 101. Cf. Also, "But with the ongoing mystery of his grace, with one life here and another there opened to all the fullness--the very 'pleroma' of God--nothing is impossible. I never fail to be astonished at what God intends to accomplish and has already accomplished through the most ordinary people. To be sure there have been great names in the history of the church But the mysterious ferment of God's grace working in the lives of men down through the ages would have died out long ago if he had been dependent only upon the great ones. God is pleased to work with nobodies (made abundantly clear on a winter's night when there was no room in an inn), nobodies who become somebodies when their eyes are filled with wonder at the unsearchable riches of his love and their hearts opened to the fullness of that love so that it can no longer be contained but must spill over to break down the walls of hostility in families, communities, nations and churches." (Steimle, Disturbed By Joy, pp. 44-45.)

His sovereignty are to search for means to "put biblical truth into the practical terms of mid-twentieth-century politics, economics, and international relations," discerning "its relevance for foreign aid, conservation programs, and international control of outer space."⁴⁶

The split between sacred and secular is healed in the grace of the Redeemer who is also the Creator, and men of faith are directed to areas of responsibility in every realm of life.

c. Participation. The extension of the meaning of "spaciousness" into the whole range of the world's life suggests already a third characteristic of the Christian style of life to which Steinle devotes attention. The voice of God's promise which comes to us amid the tragic and baffling realities of existence does not permit us to sit tight "in our secure little churches, fearful of the wilderness around us."⁴⁷ Rather, it propels us into "loving involvement in the wilderness of life around us, whether it be in political activity or in demonstrations against injustice of whatever kind, or in the hard ethical decisions of business, or in whatever need the community in which we live places before us."⁴⁸ The proper Christian style, as Steinle views it, is not the passive stance of a spectator at the edge of the arena in which the world agonizes but the active engagement of a participant on the floor of the arena itself. The cue for this engagement has already been given by "the God of the Bible who comes

⁴⁶Steinle, Disturbed By Joy, pp. 52-53.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 33.

⁴⁸Ibid.

down into the wilderness of life's perplexities and savage tragedy as a child in a stable."⁴⁹

Still more clearly than in the "stable," God has given the Christian a paradigm for the pattern of his life in the Cross. In a Palm Sunday sermon, "Ride on to Die," Steimle notes the desire of men for quick, decisive solutions to the monumental problems of today's world; characteristically, they resort to violence to bring a speedy end to some unyielding problem. But the result is that "we are all losers and the immediate problem at hand merely changes into a bigger and more complex problem."⁵⁰ Men shun the slow and infinitely costly way of love. It appears unrealistic in the face of such "big and ugly problems" as the Communist threat, racial tensions, and the stark reality of world poverty. Thus, when, in an earlier age, Jesus rode in triumph into Jerusalem, men were quickened with hope that He was about to give them "God's big and dramatic answer to the big and ugly problems of their world."⁵¹ Instead, He rode to His death, leaving men with a sign that the way of God is "the way of creative obedience and suffering."⁵²

While Steimle does not deny importance of the political structures through which men operate corporately in the interest of peace and justice, he tends to stress the significance of the direct,

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 32.

⁵⁰Steimle, Are You Looking for God? p. 133.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 136.

⁵²Ibid.

personal relationships by which men can add to the increment of love in the world. Each man is to see himself as an agent of "God's answer" to the world in which he lives. Thus, the person who, like the paralytic in the Gospel, has been delivered from the bondage of guilt must go back into the same world from which he came as "a part of God's creative answer to the needs of our time."⁵³ Likewise, the man whose "empty house" of life has been purged of demonic powers and filled with the fullness of grace must communicate that same fullness into "the aching void" which marks the world's life. And this filling of the world's emptiness is, in Steimle's view, essentially a person-to-person operation:

The change cannot take place overnight. It happens one by one. It will be slow, heartbreakingly slow at times. But it can and does happen. And when it does happen it has no other place to start except with you.⁵⁴

In these terms, even the answer to prayer depends upon the willingness of the Christian man to back his prayers with concrete acts of love. Prayers for peace, for example, which have been raised with such fervor in the twentieth century, are not apt to be answered until "you and I and the rest of us prove with open hands and outgoing hearts that we really mean it and are willing to work and sacrifice for it."⁵⁵ Such an outlook serves as the counter-balance to the command to "wait" which, as we noted above, Steimle stressed in the first half of the sermon, "The Patience and Impatience of God."⁵⁶ Just as

⁵³Ibid., p. 38.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 83.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 52.

⁵⁶Cf. p. 231 above.

man must learn, in some circumstances, to abide God's good time, even so there are other circumstances in which he must "hurry" in order to keep up with God's own impatience to right the wrongs of this world's life. Waiting upon God does not mean "twiddling our thumbs," and sometimes, when it's to our advantage, we carry that misunderstanding into areas of life where vigorous action is required.

There are . . . thoroughly devout and sincere Christians who hear only the word to wait when anything regarding the racial problem comes up. As a result the church for the most part has been taking its eternity, while professional sports, schools, public accommodations, the armed forces, and even public housing redeem the time.⁵⁷

Thus, both "wait" and "hurry" are necessary elements of the Christian style of life: ". . . wait is the expression of faith, of openness; hurry is the expression of obedience; together they spell faithful, trusting obedience, the creaturely response to the God who created him."⁵⁸

C. AN APPRAISAL OF THE CALL TO OBEDIENCE IN HOFFMANN AND STEIMLE

Having completed now a survey of the way Hoffmann and Steimle handle paraenetic material in their preaching, we will return to the criteria for preaching the call to obedience which were proposed at the close of Chapter Five. We will state each criterion in turn and, in the light of it, evaluate the homiletical material we have just examined.

⁵⁷Steimle, Disturbed By Joy, p. 148.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 150.

1. The call to obedience will have a significant place in Lutheran preaching.

How one finally grades Hoffmann and Steimle with reference to this criterion is dependent upon the weight he assigns to the adjective "significant." A survey of the sermons in the collections studied reveals that the call to obedience certainly has a place in the preaching of both men, but it does not occupy a large place. By actual count, eighteen of the thirty-two Hoffmann sermons examined contain some references to the ethical consequences of faith. For Steimle, the proportion is a little higher--twenty-three of thirty-five. This means that, for Hoffmann, just under one-half and, for Steimle, just under one-third of the sermons give no measurable attention to what would be categorized theologically as the area of "sanctification." A few of these sermons do deal with other dimensions of the Christian life, e.g., the necessity for "witnessing to the Gospel" (Hoffmann), the way to make one's way through "the dark night of the soul" (Steimle); but there are also sermons which are devoted entirely to the exposition of a doctrine, e.g., a Steimle sermon on the Trinity, or which stop with the pronouncement of judgment and the announcement of grace. Furthermore, in many of the sermons where the call to obedience is sounded, this theme is clearly subsidiary to the preaching of judgment and grace.

My own judgment is that both men could do more with the theme of "obedience" and still be short of elevating it to a position which

threatens the primacy of the kerygma. A specific instance is a Pentecost sermon by Hoffmann--"Unity of the Spirit"--in which he affirms over and over the fact that "the Spirit of God is at work in the world," creating unity. There is, however, no development of the idea that Christians are the contemporary agents of the Spirit's unifying action, sent out individually and corporately on missions of reconciliation to a broken world. Likewise, Steimle, in a sermon on the text, "Love never fails," (I Cor. 13:8), speaks eloquently of the power of love--both God's and man's--to transcend the negativities of existence, but he fails, it seems to me, to complete the thrust of the text itself by not moving on to a fully developed call for Christians to incarnate the indefatigability of love in their own relationships with others. The sermon is strong in assurance but, in balance, underdeveloped in the area which Joest designates as usus practicus evangelii.

It is also worthy of note that with one possible exception to be indicated later, Steimle devotes no single sermon to the analysis of an ethical question or the description of the shape of Christian obedience in some specific sphere of life. The call to obedience comes as a subsidiary theme in the course of his preaching. Hoffmann, on the other hand, does devote two sermons primarily to the sphere of family living, one to the duties of Christian citizenship, and another to the question of violence. It is difficult to see how either man, preaching during the years when these sermons were delivered, could avoid a more frontal engagement with the issues of race and war. Steimle, especially, makes frequent reference to them in the course of preaching on

other themes, but neither man devotes a whole sermon to analyzing, from a biblical perspective, the moral questions surrounding these issues and suggesting an appropriate Christian response.

2. The sermon will sound the call to obedience as a consequence of grace and not its cause.

With regard to this second criterion, neither Hoffmann nor Steimle can be faulted. Both avoid what, especially in the Lutheran tradition, would be counted a particularly glaring perversion of the Gospel--"justification by works." We noted above, in negative fashion, Steimle's failure to make the ethical consequences of faith--especially in relation to major social issues--a dominant theme in any single sermon. The call to obedience always sounds within the context of a message dominated by some central affirmation of the Gospel. The positive side of this pattern is that it safeguards the preacher against the preaching of an ethical idealism which has no visible roots in the kerygma. Yet, it is possible to maintain this organic connection between "demand" and "grace," even when the call to obedience is the dominant theme of a sermon. Hoffmann demonstrates this in his treatments of family life and political life. In the sermons dealing with these spheres, the delineation of what Hoffmann sees to be a "Christian style of life" is the major concern, but in none of them are judgment and grace neglected.

Though both men avoid speaking of obedience in terms of meritorious action, there is a tone in Steimle's preaching on this theme

which makes what he says less open to misunderstanding than Hoffmann's treatment of the same theme. We have noted Steimle's strong preference for the indicative in speaking of the manifestations of the Christian life and, by contrast, Hoffmann's more frequent resort to the imperative and hortatory. The use of the imperative and the hortatory, with their accent on the role of man's own will, can obscure the primary role of grace in the Christian life and lead a man to over-value his own contribution. The use of the indicative, on the other hand, helps preserve the understanding of the Christian life as a new, grace-generated existence out of which a certain life style will begin to grow freely and spontaneously. There is, of course, a legitimate and necessary role for man's will in the working out of the ethical consequences of grace, and Steimle does not neglect this. In fact, in his sermon, "The Paradox in Living Like a Christian," he struggles to make sense of the tension between the "is" and the "ought" dimensions of the Christian life and, in so doing, helps us understand some of the hidden dynamics which issue in Christian obedience. Hoffmann's sermon on a similar theme--"Obedience to the Unenforceable"--contains no such careful analysis of these dynamics but simply asserts that the presence of love will motivate men to an obedience no law can enforce.

In short, while both preachers keep the sequence between "grace" and "obedience" straight, Steimle, by his preference for the indicative and his more careful analysis of the relationship between spontaneity and effort, presents a clearer picture of the nature of that life to which the Christian is called.

3. The sermon will articulate the call to obedience with concreteness.

In Chapter V, reference was made to Ragnar Bring's statement that speaking concretely about the will of God is "the most difficult part" of preaching the Law.⁵⁹ For Hoffmann and Steimle, preaching as they do to a largely anonymous radio audience, this difficulty is compounded. They do not have the advantage of preaching from within the context of a specific local congregation with its immediate range of internal and external relationships. Likewise, the fact that their sermons must be recorded some days in advance of their actual delivery prevents them from responding directly to even national and international events which may have reached a critical stage during a given week.

This "general" nature of their audience understandably induces a more "general" tone to their call to obedience than one would expect to find in normal parish preaching. Except in the case of Hoffmann's sermon on violence in the aftermath of the assassination of Robert Kennedy, there is no instance of either preacher addressing an immediately emergent national issue. When Hoffmann chooses to direct sermons to family life, it is no doubt because he assumes most listeners in a mass audience have involvement in this sphere. Here Hoffmann can become quite specific in delineating what he considers a proper Christian style. Whether or not one agrees with his image of parenthood, there

⁵⁹Cf. p. 210 above.

is no mistaking the picture he projects--as much by description of what a good parent is not as by description of what he is. The positive image is projected most clearly by way of the account of a "stern but kind" Irish father subjecting his daughter's prospective date to a half-hour interrogation before permitting her to leave the house!

The concreteness with which Hoffmann speaks of parenthood is missing in many of the other sermons in which the call to obedience is sounded. Too often he is content with generalized exhortations which lack sufficient concreteness to be helpful. The Christian community for example, is called to be "a healing and reconciling force amid the brokenness of the world," but no specific guidelines are offered as to the actual shape that force will take, other than to call on Christians "to have a heart for others."⁶⁰ In another sermon, Hoffmann asserts that the "duty of witness to Christ is the cross Christ asks all his followers to take up for Him,"⁶¹ but there is no suggestion as to the form the cross might take in the actualities of modern life for the ordinary person. In one sermon, the nature of Christian love is given substance by a description of a young pastor's persistent effort on behalf of a retarded Negro alcoholic,⁶² but often the exhortation to "love" or to "have a heart," or to "follow Christ," or to "say Yes to life" needs more fleshing out in terms of persons acting out the

⁶⁰Hoffmann, "Healing In Christ: You and Others," pp. 5, 6.

⁶¹Hoffmann, "The End Is the Beginning," p. 6.

⁶²Hoffmann, "Dare to Ask. Dare to Touch," p. 6.

Christian style in real life.

Steimle strives for concreteness in his call to obedience by employing to good effect a device we have had occasion to note in previous chapters--the "montage." He attempts to make some dimension of the Christian life real for his varied and largely unknown audience by flashing before them quick images of people who embody that dimension in actual life, hoping that in one or the other of the images the listener will find some clue to the shape of his own response. A paragraph from "Cross and Glory" in which Steimle is attempting to illustrate the strange ways in which God's glory is manifest in man's actions in the world is typical of his style:

There was a minister in Cleveland mightily concerned about the problem of integration in the schools who, while engaging in a public protest, got mangled to death by a bulldozer in the process. A stupid waste, I suppose. Or, there's a teacher in a classroom, someone like Sylvia Barrett in Up the Down Staircase, who despite all the bureaucratic irritations, defeats, and frustrations, gets a tremendous kick out of seeing to it that her kids learn to read and write and think and develop as persons. Or there's an ordinary house painter who gets tremendous satisfaction out of a job really well done. Or there's a daughter putting up with her elderly, fretful mother who is convinced she has lived too long, as well as an elderly mother putting up with a fretful, impatient daughter. Or there is the student, convinced that the most crucial issue of our times is civil rights, going off to help in voter registration.⁶³

Very occasionally Steimle uses a more extended illustration to point the direction of Christian obedience, as in an account of the response of the churches to the plight of displaced persons after

⁶³Steimle, Disturbed By Joy, p. 69; cf. p. 19 for another illustration of the same technique.

World War II⁶⁴ or the newspaper story of a Negro who overcame the prejudice of an abusive white man by offering to pay his fine in court.⁶⁵ There are times when further use of such fuller "episodic" illustrations to serve as dramatic paradigms of the aspect of the Christian life under consideration would strengthen the impact of a sermon. But Steimle's skill with the brief, pointed image and his determination constantly to ground "obedience" in concrete existence save his preaching from any sense of detachment from real life.

4. The sermon will point to spheres of obedience in the public as well as the private sector.

In Chapter IV, it was observed that Luther's understanding of the "stations" or "offices" through which men fulfill their Christian vocation in the secular spheres opens a way for Lutheran preaching to address the public sector as well as the private. It is precisely in their roles as citizens and workers that people can do the works of love and engage in the struggle for justice. Hoffmann gives major attention to the public realm in only two of his sermons--"The Sanctity of Human Life" and "Trust Not in Politicians." The first deals in a rather general way with violence, moving from the assassination of Robert Kennedy to a call for men to recognize the sanctity of human life. Surprisingly, there is no reference whatsoever to war as an

⁶⁴Steimle, Are You Looking for God? pp. 133-134.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 117.

occasion of the mass violation of life's sanctity. The second sermon decries the self-indulgent attitude of the citizenry which, in turn, breeds corruption on the part of politicians. The sermon ends with a call to Christians to fulfill their office as citizens by: (1) having respect for those in authority; (2) taking their citizenship seriously; and (3) praying for those in authority. Obviously, there is nothing here that would strike the average listener as in any way challenging, let alone radical.

The "safe" nature of these two sermons in which the public realm is addressed suggests that there is little by way of a socially prophetic note in Hoffmann's preaching. He makes an occasional reference to racial prejudice, but it is obvious that the themes of judgment and redemption for the individual hold the central place in his preaching. He does not speak with any comparable amplitude of the ways in which redeemed men and the redeemed community are to serve as a redemptive force within social structures that impoverish and destroy men today. What Christian obedience might look like in terms of the search for peace, the uses of the environment, or the practices of the business world falls outside the range of Hoffmann's preaching.

Steimle, on the other hand, communicates a sense of being more closely in touch with the vexing public issues of contemporary life. The one sermon which could be construed as being addressed primarily to the public realm⁶⁶ is based on the story of Jonah and applies that

⁶⁶Cf. p. 61 above.

parable's attack on Israel's exclusivism to the narrowness and prejudice which pervade our own national consciousness. We have also noted that an ecological application is one point within the sermon on the miracle story of the stilling of the storm. The impression of social awareness Steimle communicates, however, is more broadly based than these sermons in which a public issue is dealt with at some length. It stems rather from the fact that, scattered throughout the sermons, there are references to and illustrations from such areas of contemporary concern as the civil rights struggle, America's relations with Russia and Communist China, the United Nations as a structure for peace, the morality of patient negotiation as against the immorality of mass bombing, etc. These and other public questions are not often treated in a sustained and systematic way, but the references are frequent enough and pointed enough to convey to the listener a sense that the political and economic realms are arenas no less legitimate than more intimate areas of human relationships for the working out of Christian obedience.

Having said this, however, it appears to me that in Steimle's, as well as in Hoffmann's preaching, there is a gap at the point of speaking to the public realm. In the course of more than sixty sermons, preached during years when immense national and international problems were confronting an American audience, one anticipates more than either man does in terms of the analysis, from a biblical perspective, of such issues as race, war or poverty and the delineation of concrete possibilities for Christian response. Hoffmann almost

seizes this opportunity in the realm of political responsibility, but then has only trite things to say about the Christian's participation in political life. Steimle has vivid and insightful material scattered throughout his sermons, but could do a still greater service by an occasional sermon which focuses more sharply on a single issue.

CONCLUSIONS

It is appropriate at this point to recapitulate the work done in the substantive chapters of this study and to draw several conclusions from the investigations which have been undertaken. In Chapters One, Three and Five, we have attempted to develop a theoretical structure for the preaching of Law, Gospel and the call to obedience today, and, on the basis of that structure, we have proposed certain criteria for measuring the effectiveness with which a sermon articulates each of these categories. In Chapters Two, Four and Six we have looked at selections from the sermons of two representative Lutheran preachers of the present generation--Oswald Hoffmann and Edmund Steimle. We have tried to identify their characteristic styles of preaching Law, Gospel and the call to obedience, and, in the light of the criteria proposed in the theoretical chapters, have made an appraisal of their homiletical effectiveness.

There is a sense in which the criteria listed at the close of the odd-numbered chapters represent the findings of this study. They have grown out of an examination of Luther's theology and preaching and a survey of some contemporary writing on the subject of Law and Gospel. Their usefulness has been illustrated in the analysis and evaluation of the sermons by Hoffmann and Steimle. The criteria indicate this writer's affirmative response to the question, "Are Law and Gospel viable categories for preaching today?", but they also express certain qualifications of that affirmative answer which need to

be heard if viability is to be preserved. It will be helpful to see these criteria listed now in one place.

For Preaching Law:

1. The Law will be preached in order to confront men with their accountability for their lives.
2. The preaching of Law today will be more concerned with the underlying sin which corrupts men's lives than with its surface manifestations.
3. The preaching of Law today will take into account men's involvement in social evil as well as more directly personal expressions of sin.
4. The Law will be preached today in order to bring into consciousness the "dark underside" of man's existence.
5. The preacher of Law will find in the Gospel itself a powerful proclamation of Law.
6. The preaching of Law will not be an end in itself but will serve the purpose of the Gospel.

For Preaching Gospel:

1. The offer of forgiveness will be an essential dimension of the preaching of Gospel today.
2. The Gospel as "antiphon to existence" will be lifted to new prominence in preaching today.
3. The preaching of Gospel today will find its focus in the person and work of Jesus.

4. The preacher of Gospel today will search for an idiom which is intelligible to contemporary man.
5. The Gospel will be brought to the hearer as directly and personally as possible.

For Preaching the Call to Obedience:

1. The call to obedience will have a significant place in Lutheran preaching.
2. The sermon will sound the call to obedience as a consequence of grace and not its cause.
3. The sermon will articulate the call to obedience with concreteness.
4. The sermon will point to spheres of obedience in the public as well as the personal sector.

It is our purpose, however, to state the conclusions of this study in a way which, while continuous in substance, is different in form from the criteria just listed. The summary statements which follow here preserve the major principles enunciated in the criteria, but, because they necessitate looking at the theological dimensions of the sermon in combination rather than separately, some of them are able to carry us beyond the criteria.

1. Law and Gospel, especially where dimensions of their meaning beyond but not excluding judgment and forgiveness are given prominence, are still viable categories of proclamation.

The exploration of Luther's understanding of Law and Gospel and the examination of these categories in contemporary theology have strengthened the writer's conviction that they continue to provide a useful way of designating the fundamental content of preaching. The Christian message, no matter how the form in which it is cast in different times and places may vary, reaches men under the dual aspect of judgment and grace, demand and promise, description and prescription. In this study, we have tried to distinguish between the Law as judgment upon sin and the Law as description of existence, and, correspondingly, between the Gospel as the offer of forgiveness and the Gospel as antiphon to existence.

It is clear that the proclamation of Law as judgment and the Gospel as forgiveness is in most direct continuity with the primary meaning of those categories in the thought and practice of Luther. Some have suggested that a message whose existential pole is rooted in the experience of sin and guilt is simply obsolete today. They declare Luther's question, "How can I find a gracious God?" to be no longer expressive of modern man's plight, as he experiences it.

Hoffmann and Steimle seem to me to be correct in their assumption that there are still many people who define their ultimate problem primarily in terms of guilt. That many of these are persons for whom the experience of guilt is neurotic and pathological is obvious, and, for these, therapy is more important than preaching. But there are still many who, acknowledging their freedom and accountability before God, know that they are in no position to justify what they have

made of their lives. For them, the preaching of judgment--qualified by the criteria listed above--will be a help in discerning the source and shape of guilt in their lives, and the preaching of forgiveness will provide a sign under which, flawed as they know themselves to be, they can nevertheless live with joy and freedom.

Yet, there are many others--and they may form a majority in the contemporary world--for whom guilt is not the primary category under which they view their condition. Their self-diagnosis does not begin with the assumption that they are "sinners in the hands of an angry God." The reality of God is itself one of their questions. They resonate more immediately to such terms as meaninglessness, anxiety, despair or alienation than to categories like sin and guilt. Furthermore, even where guilt is a dominant factor in human experience, it is not the sole one. To preach Law and Gospel only in terms of guilt and forgiveness misses, therefore, those who do not see themselves first of all as sinners and neglects areas of experience which are vividly real even for those who do.

Here, if the contemporary Lutheran preacher is looking for a model, he will find Steimle a better guide than Hoffmann. Steimle's artistry in bringing to the conscious, verbal level aspects of the human condition which his listeners recognize even where they cannot articulate is "dialogic" preaching at its best. It voices the human question and then sounds antiphonally the appropriate accent of the Gospel. We have characterized this mode of preaching Law as holding before men "the mirror of existence," in which they can see

recognizable reflections of themselves. When he does this effectively, the preacher is accomplishing through the homiletic form what the creative artists of our time are doing through their forms. He is holding up an "image of man" which will elicit self-recognition from those who hear him. But he will move beyond most contemporary art and literature by portraying also an "image of grace," defined by the Incarnation of grace in Christ.

2. The Reformation heritage of Law and Gospel is most alive in preaching today precisely where its language is least duplicated.

Finding language which will communicate with reality and power is a key problem for the preacher in the whole range of the homiletical task. If there is any one area, however, in which he is under special temptation to lapse into a vocabulary which, while of honored lineage, has been drained of much meaning for modern man, it is in the realm which has been classically the preoccupation of Law and Gospel, namely, the realm of sin and forgiveness. Probably because this realm lies so close to the heart of the Christian message, phrases hallowed by long use in piety and dogma have tended to cluster here with peculiar concentration. Therefore, when the preacher addresses himself to sin and forgiveness, he has at hand an instant vocabulary from the tradition in which he stands. The Reformation heritage offers him such words as "Law," "tyrant," "condemnation," and "justification." From the Bible itself, he receives terms like "atonement," "redemption," "propitiation," and "salvation."

Here the preacher must face seriously the degree to which much of this vocabulary has become "inauthentic speech" for the contemporary congregation. It carries little of the weight of meaning it had for some earlier generations of Christians. This "meaning gap" can no doubt be traced to such factors as the biblical and theological illiteracy of many who hear preaching today and to their unfamiliarity with such practices as the ransoming of slaves or the sacrificing of animals which some of the traditional phrases presuppose. If the preacher is to use such language, he is under obligation to provide a context of explanation in which some recovery of meaning is possible. Insofar as he fails to do this, his preaching falls under the judgment Ebeling makes: "Kerygma which is unintelligible conceals the true scandal and causes offence in the wrong way. As such it fails to call men to decision."¹

Hoffmann's preaching is sometimes representative of the type to which Ebeling refers in the sentences above. We have noted his frequent resort to phrases from the piety of former generations or to a vocabulary drawn from Lutheran orthodoxy. This places him and other preachers who go this route under a double handicap: they are addressing people at a point of experience (guilt) which they may not recognize in a language they do not understand. Steimle's preaching, by contrast, is marked by a consistent effort to find what Bonhoeffer called a "non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts."

¹Gerhard Ebeling, Theology and Proclamation (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 49.

Especially when he turns his attention to sin and forgiveness, he takes seriously the necessity of translating old formulations into modern man's own tongue.

In the matter of language, Luther can serve as a mentor for the preacher today. His own sermons proclaim the Gospel as forgiveness in vivid, human terms, drawn from the immediate experience of his hearers. When he spoke of the Law as a "tyrant," people who knew the cruelty of a despotic prince or duke could catch the terror Luther meant to convey. Even "justification" began its career as a secular word; it was part of the vocabulary of courts of law. Or, still more humanly, the familiar sight of paupers on the streets of medieval towns could lead Luther to characterize us all as "beggars" before God--bankrupt of any credits we might offer Him but simply stretching out empty hands.

The contemporary preacher of Law and Gospel must, in short, do in his day what Luther did in his--struggle to find a profane (literally, "in front of the temple") vocabulary in which to cast his message. The Twentieth Century is not the Sixteenth Century or the First Century. Thus, a vocabulary which merely duplicates the language of a Luther or a Paul will impede rather than release the Gospel they communicated.

3. The preacher of Law and Gospel is most effective when he functions in terms of interpretation as well as declaration.

We had occasion in Chapter IV² to note the tension between the image of the preacher as "herald" and the image of the preacher as

²Cf. p. 171 above.

"interpreter." The "herald" image has come to the forefront in recent decades because of the significant position "kerygmatic theology" has occupied in the church's thought. Preachers have been taught to see themselves in a role analogous to that of the kerux, the ancient herald who went from place to place transmitting the emperor's latest proclamation to the populace. There was no need for him to win their assent to the message he bore. He simply announced it under the authority of the imperial power. He could "hurl it like a stone," to borrow a phrase Barth once used for the proclamation of the Gospel, and, with no attempt to exercise powers of persuasion, leave it to his listeners to respond.

The image of "interpreter" springs, however, from another context. It suggests a messenger who knows that the message he has to communicate may be, for his hearers, strange or unacceptable--or both. He will not, therefore, simply deliver it in its bare, objective form. He will rather employ all his gifts of explanation and imagination to make what he is communicating understandable and to remove, insofar as he can, barriers to its acceptance.

There has been great gain for the church in the work of Barth, Dodd, Bultmann and others in drawing preachers back to a fresh consideration of the fundamental New Testament kerygma. However these scholars might differ in defining the kerygma, they have recalled preaching to its obligation to a Word which is extra nos--a biblical message, whose center is in God's act toward men in Jesus Christ, to which we in turn must be faithful witnesses. It is harder for us

today, in light of this development, to preach ethical idealism or prudential morality with an easy conscience.

Yet, if the preacher's kerygmatic function is stressed to the point of excluding other functions, the result is damaging. If a preacher tends to see his role as chiefly that of making an objective announcement of the central themes of the Christian message, then he will tend to minimize the importance of interpreting those themes in such a way that people will be able to understand and appropriate them. It will have been enough to declare; to explain, interpret and persuade would be a departure downward from the high office of a "herald of the Gospel." Such a view sets the offices of preaching and teaching over against each other (with teaching occupying the lower position) and ignores the interacting functions they appear to have in the New Testament itself.³

It is one of Steimle's special strengths that he holds the functions of preaching and teaching, the roles of "herald" and "interpreter," in dynamic tension. He never ceases to do or be either. It would be overstating the case to say that Hoffmann fails entirely in this regard, but many of his sermons seem to me to be weakened by a tendency to proclaim or exhort without helping the listener to appropriate what is proclaimed or to see what might be involved in response to an exhortation. Where Hoffmann, for example, on occasion simply announces that Jesus Christ forgives sin, Steimle struggles patiently

³Cf. p. 204.

to help a man who may have little comprehension of sin see, in secular terms and images, what it means, and to guide him, often through analogies drawn from ordinary human experience, into the reality of forgiveness. Likewise, Steimle is less apt to stop short with exhortation and imperative but takes pains to probe, on behalf of his listener, the anatomy of faith and obedience.

Since, even in our churches, we are often preaching to people for whom the Christian message has become a "strange Gospel," it is particularly important for the preacher to exercise fully his didactic and interpretative roles. He will do this, not in lieu of proclaiming the kerygma, but in order to let the kerygma be heard with understanding.

4. Lutheran preaching must take care not to mute the call to obedience, especially with reference to the public realm.

Lutheranism, no doubt under anxiety not to fall into a new form of "justification by works," has had less to say about obedience than about grace and faith. There is probably some truth in the charge that Lutheran theology has sometimes been guilty of a "unitarianism of the Second Person." The Article of Redemption in the three-fold Creed of the church has ranked higher than the Articles of Creation and Sanctification. The uneasiness of Lutheranism about the "third use of the Law" which Reformed theology affirms so readily is a further sign of the difficulty it has in speaking of the life that follows justification.

The anticipated homiletical consequence of this theological bias would be preaching that has the center of its gravity in the second, or "theological," use of the Law and in the Gospel's announcement of grace. Preaching would function primarily to propel men on that journey of judgment and forgiveness which Luther's phrase about the Law describes: "to show men their sin and drive them to Christ." The description of and the call to that life of which grace is the source would not be expected to be a major theme.

If Hoffmann and Steimle are in any way representative of Lutheran preaching today, they suggest that the preaching of Law (either as "judgment" or "description") and Gospel (either as "forgiveness" or "antiphon") continue to hold the central place in Lutheran preaching. It is this writer's judgment that they should. At the same time, without weakening this center, it is his conviction that there is room for more frequent and sustained attention to paraenetic themes in Lutheran preaching. Hoffmann and Steimle do not neglect the call to obedience in their preaching, but they have--and especially Hoffmann--a considerable distance to go before ethical instruction and exhortation become a threat to the kerygma in which they must always be rooted.

The New Testament witness itself seems to me to call for more proportionate attention to didache and paraenesis. C. H. Dodd has called attention to the alternating pattern in the Gospels and Epistles between kerygmatic material and material relating to the quality of the new life in Christ. Careful study of Luther's own

thought and preaching reveals his urgent concern that faith be "active in love."

In addition, the moral dilemmas in which people today find themselves caught represent a silent appeal from the pew for the pulpit to help in the search for a "Christian way" through bewildering circumstances. Changing family patterns, the "new morality" in relations between the sexes, difficult and complex ethical decisions in the world of work, the questions surrounding the use of alcohol and drugs--are only a few of the areas in which people are disturbed and perplexed. Just as congregations in First Century Rome, Corinth, or Ephesus looked to apostles and teachers for light upon personal and practical questions of conduct, so modern congregations have a right to expect the clergyman--the "bearer of the tradition" in their midst --to assist them in shaping a Christian style of life in contemporary circumstances.

Likewise, the public realm with its massive problems of war, poverty, racial injustice, urban blight and ecological destruction represents an arena for Christian response. A reading of Luther which properly accounts for the particular socio-political structure in which he spoke offers no justification for the social quietism with which his descendants have sometimes been justly charged. We have found in his interpretation of the usus politicus of the Law and in his doctrine of vocation sufficient basis for legitimizing preaching which addresses itself to the public realm.

Steimle typifies one possible approach to such preaching: he takes up social issues largely in the course of sermons whose primary thrust is more broadly gauged. Often reference to a public question will be one application among others he is making. This may be the pattern which is most appropriate in a church whose preaching is regulated by a set of Sunday-by-Sunday lections. There is, however, need, in a day when the problems of the public realm have become so critical for masses of people, for occasional sermons whose major burden will be the analysis, from a biblical perspective, of some political or economic issue, and guidance with regard to possible forms of response.

5. Taking seriously the dimensions of Law, Gospel and the call to obedience does not require an equal balance among all three elements in every sermon.

It would be arbitrary and artificial to measure the theological adequacy of a sermon by determining the quantity of material devoted to each of the elements mentioned above. The schema of Law, Gospel and call to obedience is not intended as a proposal for sermons whose symmetry of parts will always be like the sides of an equilateral triangle. Most sermons will develop along far more irregular lines of configuration.

Two considerations will condition the balance of the theological elements in the sermon. There is first the biblical text out of which the sermon grows. The preacher will have respect for what Barth somewhere calls the "one-sidedness of the text." If Matthew 23, with

its account of Jesus' scorn for the hypocrisy of the Pharisees is the text, the Gospel dimension of a sermon based upon it is not apt to be dominant. If, on the other hand, the text is Second Isaiah's call, "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God" (40:1), the element of Gospel will likely outweigh the element of Law. Likewise, a sermon based on one of the paraenetic paragraphs in Ephesians 3-6 will probably have its strongest thrust in the direction of the call to obedience. It is not that the other two elements will be absent from a sermon on any one of these texts; it is only that the sermon, in the interests of exegetical integrity, will be balanced toward that theological pole which is dominant in the text itself.

The other conditioning factor in the theological "mix" of the sermon will be the preaching context. The particularity of the congregation to which the preacher speaks will affect, within limits of faithful exegesis, the proportions by which a sermon develops. If, for example, he is preaching on Isaiah 40:1 to an exceedingly comfortable and affluent congregation, he will in all likelihood need to sound the note of Law with sufficient strength to strip away the veneer of security which often hides the need for the Gospel's word of assurance.

Thus, the clear intent of the text and the immediate preaching situation will determine the balance in which Law, Gospel and the call to obedience appear in a specific sermon. What is a major theme in one sermon will be only a minor theme in another. It is even possible that in a given sermon one theme will not be heard at all, but such a

gap will not be normative.

6. Law, Gospel and the call to obedience form the essential theological substructure of the sermon, but they are not a necessary sequence in the actual homiletical form.

While there is a certain theological logic in the Law-Gospel-call to obedience order, it would be wrong to insist that every sermon must move forward along the continuum of these three points. A sermon is, in one sense, an art form, and each one tends to develop according to an inner structure of its own. Grady Davis has classified sermon designs by what he calls five major "organic forms": (1) a subject discussed; (2) a thesis supported; (3) a message illuminated; (4) a question propounded; (5) a story told.⁴ The way in which the theological elements play in and out of a sermon will depend in part upon the demands imposed by the particular form in which the sermon is cast. The major thrust of the sermon will also help determine where each of the three elements finds its place; since the last point is ordinarily climactic, and, therefore, the point of strength, whatever is to be the major burden of the sermon--Law, Gospel, or call--will normally take the concluding position.

Furthermore, it is not always possible to separate with absolute precision the three theological strands mentioned above. There are times, for example, when the call to live in love will function

⁴Henry Grady Davis, Design for Preaching (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), pp. 139f.

as judgment, since it exposes the gap between the possibility and the actuality of our lives. Likewise, as we have had occasion to note, the preaching of the Cross, with its theme of redemptive love, can function as Law, uncovering as it does, the fate of love incarnate at the hands of men like ourselves. Again, the call to obedience can even carry an undertone of Gospel, since it implies a hopeful estimate of the self which may contradict a mood of self-despair in the listener.

When one scans the sermons of Hoffmann and Steimle with their "design" in mind, he is struck by the variety of ways in which the elements of Law, Gospel and call are arranged. A few sermons follow exactly this order. Both men frequently start with an effort to describe the human situation, either with regard to guilt or some other expression of man's predicament. Steimle shows some tendency to begin sermons with none of the elements we have mentioned, but with strictly "teaching" material concerning the meaning of the text itself. Hoffmann, more often than Steimle, closes a sermon on a note of exhortation. Steimle, on the other hand, frequently concludes a sermon with a strong affirmation of some dimension of the Gospel. But aside from such tendencies, the sermon designs in these collections are unpredictable. They are clearly not determined by the theological logic in the sequence Law, Gospel and call to obedience. They confirm the observation of Heinrich Ott, whose ordering of the major theological motifs in the sermon, corresponds to ours: "As a rule the individual sermon has these three parts, in this or that

order, perhaps interpenetrating each other."⁵

7. The preaching of Law, Gospel and the call to obedience must be rooted in a christological center.

Our work in this study has confirmed Ebeling's statement that "kerygma is eo ipso kerygma of Christ."⁶ Each of the three theological elements of the sermons finds its definition in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Even where He is not mentioned by name, the reality which He embodied is determinative of the message.

This is true for the preaching of Law. If Law is seen primarily as the preaching of judgment, then the true depth and extent of sin becomes clear only when we tell the story of our human inhospitality to the Word made flesh. The deepest level of our guilt lies in our persisting refusal to receive Him who "was in the world" and through whom the world was made. Its manifestation today appears in our blindness and callousness toward those of whom He said, ". . . as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me" (Matthew 25:45). If the Law is seen primarily as the description of existence, then it is in the tempted, anguished, God-and-man-forsaken Jesus that we see the image of our own human brokenness and alienation. The Cross, especially, provides the most concrete image possible of the mystery of our iniquity and the pain of our

⁵Heinrich Ott, Theology and Preaching (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), p. 53.

⁶Cf. p. 111 above.

dereliction.

Likewise, the preaching of Gospel finds its center in Christ. The New Testament record of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus is a narrative of agape love in action. Each pericope in which Jesus heals the sick, casts out demons, feeds the hungry, affirms the outcast, or speaks with power is intended as a visible, audible sign to the world of God's outreaching love. It is no accident that the Gospels, particularly the Synoptics, focus most fully on the events of the Passion, for here, as nowhere else in history, men have seen the image of a God who is "the great companion, the fellow-sufferer who understands."⁷ And in the Resurrection, however interpreted, they have found the supreme symbol of love's invincibility and, therefore, the substance of hope in the abyss of despair. In Jesus Christ, then, the preaching of Gospel--interpreted either as forgiving love which affirms even the guilty or as the promise of a victory beyond all human defeats--finds its center and substance.

Finally, the call to obedience has its foundation in Christ. The new life to which preaching summons men is possible only because of the freedom of which He is the source. By liberating men from the bondage of anxiety for themselves and their destiny, the grace enfleshed in Christ enables men to reach out in love to their neighbors. No longer preoccupied with themselves, they are free to participate creatively in the life of the world. In this sense, His love

⁷Alfred North Whitehead, Process and Reality (New York: Macmillan, 1929), p. 532.

engenders love. Furthermore, it is the human career of Jesus of Nazareth which provides the paradigm for the life to which the Christian man and the Christian community are called. As He was "the Man for others," even so His people are to grow into the form of a servanthood whose clearest sign is, once again, the Cross.

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